

# HOW TO WRITE PHOTO-PLAYS

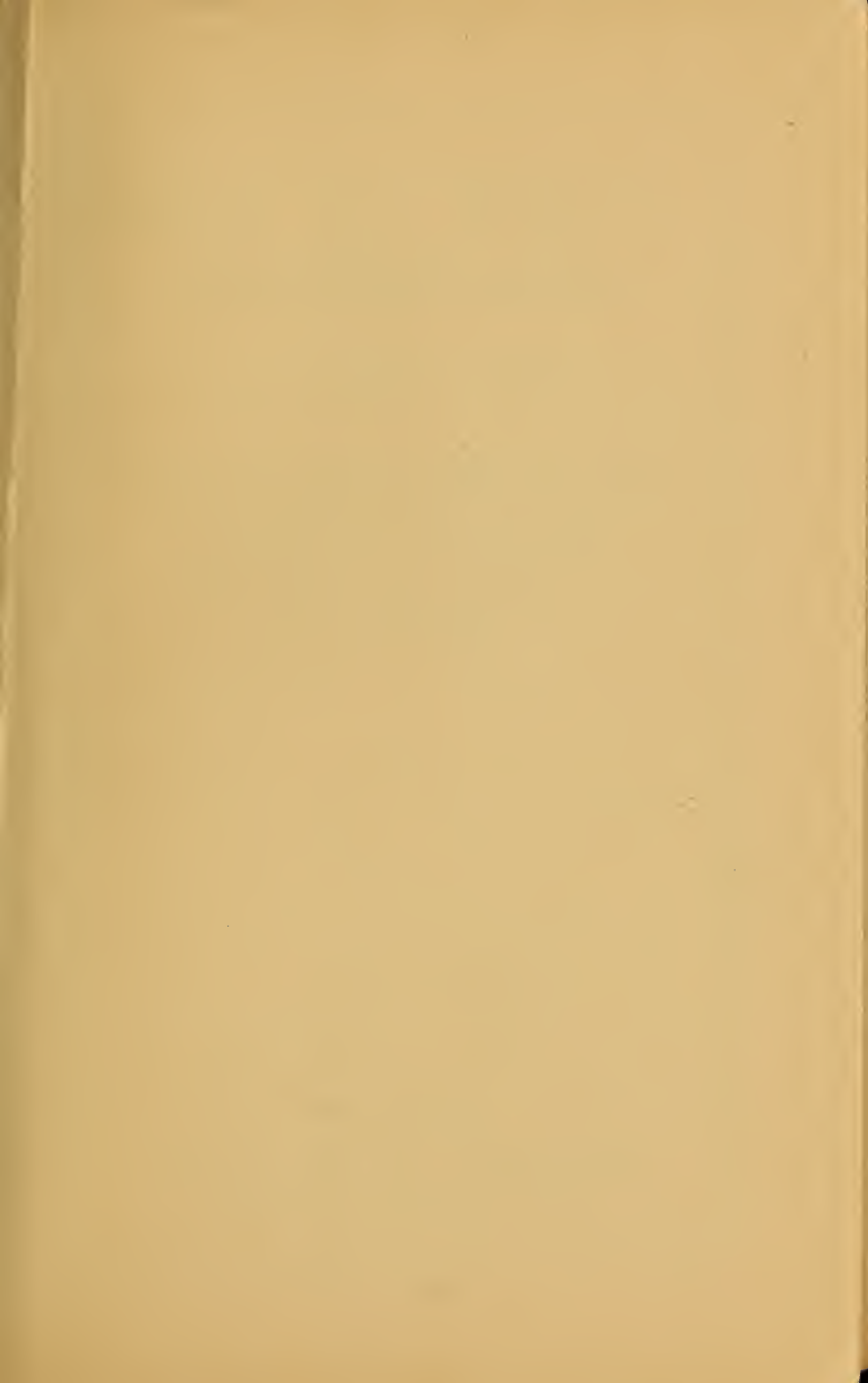
CLARENCE J. CAINE



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# HOW TO WRITE PHOTOPLAYS

By CLARENCE J. CAINE

A REPRODUCTION OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES  
ON THE SUBJECT AS THEY APPEARED IN  
THE "HINTS FOR SCENARIO WRITERS"  
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How To Write Photoplays

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# How to Write Photo Plays.

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Slowly, but with a firmness that is unmistakable, the photo-playwright is pushing forward. It was not so very long ago that picture after picture was projected upon screens throughout the country without the public having the slightest idea of the identity of the man in whose mind the plot of the pictured story originated. And, because nobody was particularly interested in the writers, and because the writers did not seem to care at first for publicity, it became an established custom to produce photo plays without giving any credit whatsoever to their authors. The financial returns, in the majority of cases, were also small. The past year, however, has seen a wonderful advancement in the art of writing the photo drama.

More money is paid by all the recognized companies, and the majority of these concerns now give credit to writers on the screen. It is only the late arrival of a condition which should always have existed; for the scenario, while it cannot be called the most important element in making pictures, to the exclusion of photography, is nevertheless one of the vital parts of a production, for it has been largely through the skill of the photo-playwrights in supplying the demand for "something different" that photo plays have gripped the public.

Much responsibility rests with the writer of the silent drama if he attempts to supply a script which does not have to be revamped in the studio—and no finished working script does—for he has outlined the thing which, when interpreted by players and transferred to the celluloids, will either make the audience enthuse or send it away weary. In other words, the finished scenario comes closer to being the thing which will sway the public's favor than either the acting or photography, though, as all of us know, both these elements are highly essential.

Considering this fact, it is easy to see why some of the biggest men in the industry have said that the day of the scenario writer was not far off. It is very true that the present trend of production is toward adaptations, but what will happen when the majority of the books fitted to the screen have been used? It is also true that new books and short stories will be created as regularly in the future as in the past, but only a small percentage of them will make acceptable photo plays. The man or woman who is ready to supply a manuscript for the production of a photo drama, not "an idea for a movie play," when the "famine" comes, will find a welcome awaiting him or her, and will be rewarded both by financial returns and exploitation on the screen.

#### INJECTING MOTIVES.

If you knew nothing about photo-play construction and strolled into a theater to enjoy the show, wouldn't you be disappointed if you saw a picture in which one

of the characters—usually the hero or heroine—moved about from scene to scene and did things to help the story to a finish, without having anything to influence his or her actions? Knowing nothing of the mechanical construction of the photo play, you would naturally not be able to tell why you did not like it, but you would feel that somehow it wasn't just right. Suppose, now, that we take our pet scenario and carefully examine it. In scene 16 we find that the hero, who has been South for the winter, suddenly packs his golf sticks and hurries to New York, arriving just in time to save the heroine from death in scene 17. Doesn't the question immediately arise in your mind: "Why did he hasten to New York?" We remember that when we wrote this pet story we had in mind the fact that his father's illness suddenly caused his return, but in our enthusiasm to get the script started on its rounds, we forgot to inject this motive into the scenario, thereby giving the editor the impression that the story is inconsistent. It is well to bear in mind that no matter how plausible a story appears in your mind's eye, it will shoot wide of its mark unless you are able to clearly carry your thoughts to those who interpret them. For this reason it is always well to go over a finished scenario carefully with the cold eye of an outsider and see, among other things, that everything that happens has a reason. These reasons, or motives, can be created very often in a manner which benefits the story by tightening up the interest, but whether they are a vital part of the story or not you

will find that they exist in practically every photo play which appeals strongly to an intelligent person.

#### CORRALLING THE FLEETING IDEA.

Ideas—if you work in a newspaper office you probably know them as “hunches”—for photo-play plots are to be found all about us every hour of the day, and, as any writer soon learns, the careful selection of material from what is offered plays no small part in climbing the steep road to success. A scenario writer without a storehouse full of ideas is like a druggist without drugs or a butcher without meat—he has nothing to sell. You may say that you can get ideas as you go along, but you would hardly wait for the druggist or butcher to go out and secure what you asked him for when you knew you could get it at the store across the street. When a producing company suddenly calls for two-reel sea scripts, they, like yourself, will not wait on any one, but will take the first good ones available, and the man with several ideas for sea stories stored away in his files stands ninety per cent more chance of being the first to offer a worthy script. He has had the idea for some time, and has given it consideration, whereas the man who “grabs off” a ready-made idea and hurriedly puts it into scenario form will very likely present a script which compares anything but favorably with the first man’s. It is well, therefore, to form the pencil-and-notebook habit and jot down ideas wherever you find them—at home, at work, on the street, at parties, in



church, while reading the paper, and hundreds of other places. Then you are never short of material to work with, and in case you get an advance tip on a market you will be able to turn it to a profitable use. And, remember, an idea is just a sudden inspiration, and unless strongly impressed on the mind, will soon vanish, probably never again to appear.

#### AGAIN THE ELEMENT OF CARELESSNESS.

Recently we had occasion to call on the editors of two companies, neither of whom are purchasing much from the outside at the present time. During both visits, we were told that within the past two months the authors have become negligent in regard to sending a stamped, self-addressed, return envelope with every script. For some time this worry seemed to have been taken off the editors' shoulders, as most of the submitting writers conformed with studio requirements in regard to this, but it seems that many have lapsed into the old habit, or else a new crop of writers has risen who know nothing of this rule. We hope, however, that none of our readers will be guilty of this offense, or the equally fatal ones of writing on two sides of the paper, or in longhand, or forgetting to place your name on the top of the first sheet of the manuscript and the bottom of the last; or, worst of all, rolling a manuscript.

#### A WORKING SCRIPT.

The ambition of practically all beginners and of a great number who have sales to their credit is to write a working script. To some it seems to come natural

while others could not furnish a perfect scenario to save their lives. In some cases, this is undoubtedly due to the fact that the meaning of "working script" has never fully been comprehended.

This is simply the term applied to a scenario which is handed to a director and which can be produced as written, excepting a few minor changes necessitated by footage, accidents, et cetera. It is safe to say that the majority of perfect working scripts are more the results of careful criticism by the authors after they have been written than of wonderful forethought. For instance, if you write a scene in which you state that Mary hurries to the grocery store around the corner, telephones, and returns home, you will find, upon carefully examining the script after its completion, that three scenes, rather than one, are necessary to "get over" this action—one in the room as Mary leaves, one in the store as she telephones, and one in the room again as she returns. Had the script been accepted by a studio in its original form, a staff writer would have gone over it and made this change, and we would not have written a working script.

One example does not really do this subject justice, but even the beginner can realize that several changes of this kind would necessitate considerable work on the part of the salaried staff man, even though we assume that the plot action was excellent, and the price offered for the script would go down in accordance. If you would write a working script, you must constantly keep before you what the finished production would be like

when thrown on the screen and just what an impression each scene would make on an outsider seeking diversion. It is here that the majority of new writers fall down. They cannot analyze their own scripts.

To overcome this weakness, every scenario should be written as close to perfection as possible, a terse description of the action to take place in each scene being set down in such a comprehensive manner that the director cannot fail to grasp it. Then the script should be put away for a few days. When it has "cooled off," it should be gone over with a cold, critical eye to see if a scenario has been written which could be placed upon the screen in its original form and which would transfer every idea the writer had in mind clearly to any audience. If not, the weak points will probably be noted and the changes made.

#### THE MYSTERY STORY.

It seems to us that until a writer has become familiar enough with technique to be sure of himself, he should heed the danger sign which is placed near the mystery story. Without a doubt, the screen offers many opportunities for the development of this class of stories, but it must be remembered that it is infinitely easier to spring a surprise via fiction of the spoken drama than through the medium of the silent art.

The Essanay Film Manufacturing Company has been specializing in this particular class of productions for some time, but their scripts are prepared by experienced

staff writers who have long since mastered technique. An excellent example of a mystery play was their release entitled "Thirteen Down." A man is taken from the bread line by a millionaire, who had made a bet with a friend that environment will change any man, and is appointed secretary to his benefactor. The millionaire has an invention which he is about to sell the United States government, and the actions of the man of the streets makes the millionaire's daughter think he is planning to steal it. A friend of the millionaire is told of the whereabouts of the invention, and, upon returning from the theater one evening, the inventor finds his friend and another man prisoners in the hands of the man of the streets. The latter explains that the men attempted to steal the invention, as they are in the employ of a foreign power, and that he is a secret-service man, having been on the trail of the foreign agents at the time the millionaire took him from the bread line.

Through the entire production nothing occurs to suggest the real identity of the secret-service man, and the dénouement is entirely unexpected. Upon analyzing the plot, however, we remember that he was seen on several occasions speaking to the butler and another young man, who prove to be his assistants. We felt all along, though, that the butler was himself trying to steal the invention. To the writers who feel they can play with technique, the mystery story will very likely prove alluring, but it behooves us to remark that those who attempt the journey better be sure that their mystery is a real one, for

nothing will fall flatter than a would-be mystery, whose dénouement is obvious. Incidentally the skill of the actors and actresses, in whose hands the leading rôles are placed, plays no small part in a production of this kind, for in many scenes the miscarriage of the slightest bit of acting is liable to reveal their identity.

When a beginner sits down to write a scenario, one of the most difficult questions which confronts him is just how much shall be written to make his subject one, two, or three reels, as the case may be. Many experienced writers claim they overcame this trouble by closely studying the producing methods of the companies for which they write, and that they now can easily turn out a script which gives the director very little worry over the length question. There are many more who have been writing for years, but who have never been able to tell just why they end their scenarios where they do; others who work by the approximate number of scenes per reel, used by a certain company to whom they generally sell.

It is an important issue, and one which really cannot be answered to the entire satisfaction of the man who is new at scenario production. It seems a pity that some manufacturer does not strike out boldly and make a habit of producing natural-length reels. By this we do not mean that they should market seven hundred and fifty feet, because a story runs no farther, this being prohibited by the present method of distributing films. Why should it not be possible, though, to make natural-length



films, and then fill the remainder of the reel, whether it be the second part of a two-reel release, or the fourth part of a four-reeler, with an educational, topical, or even a little comedy skit? The first cry in opposition to this would doubtless be the cost; but when that is carefully studied we do not believe it would prove to be so enormous.

If this plan were adopted, one thing is certain: It would prove a great relief to the regular patrons of picture theaters, who wince every time they see a film crammed into one reel, or painfully padded to stretch an extra thousand feet. It seems safe to state that the editor, out of the many comedy scripts submitted, could select enough good short ones to be used as "fillers" for the gaps left by short plays.

The beginner must understand that all this is theoretical, however, for only a very few of the companies have thus far tried anything along these lines, and none have ever made a regular practice of it. Then, too, it would require an exceptionally clever director, one who was sure of just what the scenario was worth, to produce such a film. Until some company, or companies, make this practical, the best the amateur can do is to study the produced pictures on the screen, and try to acquaint himself with just how much action is required to make a reel. In watching the films closely, he will note the different ways in which films are treated; those depending on several powerful dramatic situations to sustain the interest having by far less scenes than those

in which an exciting climax is worked up to by means of the cut-back system. These two general divisions will help to master the question in part, but almost every film of the two classes is treated in a different manner, and in the administering of this treatment is hidden the question of length.

#### JUGGLING INCIDENTS.

Incidents in dramatic construction are, as the name suggests, events which are incidental to the main theme of the story. One of the faults of amateurs is that they are inclined to take everything which they hear or read regarding the making of photo plays as being an absolute truth, one which cannot be altered in any way, shape, or form.

Behind the foregoing sentences there is a moral. Recently we talked over the question of scenario writing with a man who was just trying to master its basic principles. He has read much about incidents, and their place in a plot, and had clipped reports of a number of happenings from a newspaper which he felt were excellent "incidents" for a story he had in mind. Upon looking over the clippings, we found one which suggested an entirely new and complete plot to us, so we told him about it. The result was an argument, during which he insisted that, since the clipping was merely an incident, it would be certain to draw rejection slips if written into scenario form and submitted as a complete scenario. We proceeded to show him how this same "incident," because it was strong enough to carry the weight of a plot woven

around it, could be developed or magnified, by a process we term "juggling," until it possessed all that could be required of a single-reel story.

Juggling an incident is simply studying its possibilities, and adding to or subtracting from it wherever, in your judgment, the change increases its value. The example we mentioned dealt with the changing of an incident into the germ of a story, but the same system also applies to developing an incident within a plot. Some of the most appealing crises we have seen in screen plays have been the result of working up to a sort of minor climax of an incident and giving it as much skillful treatment as though it was the main plot of the story itself. An example of this appears under the heading, "Suspense in Development," further on in this article. A writer seems to feel by instinct the cases in which this can be applied, for we have never yet heard of a rule of this kind which is ironclad. Therefore, in view of our second sentence under this heading, we hope that our readers will not apply this to every minor happening they stumble across in their scripts. It applies to many incidents—but not to all.

#### TOO MUCH REALISM.

Do not make your scenarios too realistic. Maybe this is a needless warning, for overrealism is more liable to crop out in a picture play, through the acting, or direction, than through the story. However, the chance of the interpreters making mistakes is lessened when the scenario writer eliminates from his script all situations



which allow an opportunity for director and players to take advantage of.

This does not refer to the delightful little flashes of human interest which make the screen characters appear to live, but applies rather to the grim details which some authors take delight in calling for. We all know that the jaw of a dead person will sag if the corpse is in an upright position; but we also know that those who pay to see pictures on the screen wish to be entertained rather than horrified. Crime, drunkenness, physical weakness, and similar things, also come under this heading. Another class includes needless details of business deals, the workings of the police, et cetera. The latter class certainly is permissible if it is a vital part to the plot, but some writers have a habit of placing details regarding such matters in productions in which they play no part at all, simply to make the effect realistic. While the author may be well versed on the particular thing about which he writes, he should ask himself whether he has made it entertaining for those who know nothing of it.

As long as a story appears plausible on the screen, and gives the entertainment desired, it will please the vast majority. Since there will be countless criticisms, either uttered or silent, no matter how much detail is injected, it is better to make entertainment the pre-eminent motive in constructing a photo-play scenario, without, however, making any glaring errors which can be noticed by those who merely enjoy, without analyzing. As we said before, this in no way applies to the in-

jection of "life touches" into your work, for the more films containing these that are released the greater the popularity of the silent drama.

#### SUSPENSE IN DEVELOPMENT.

Do you know how to develop suspense, and do you employ this means to increase the interest in your script? If you have never learned this, we advise you to get busy at once, and, if you have mastered it, the editors will welcome your scripts if somewhere in every one of them they will be able to find this element tucked away.

There are two kinds of suspense. One is legitimate, and works up to a natural climax or crisis, and the other is illegitimate, and gets nowhere, as it is simply put in as a "thrill." There are many ways of obtaining the desired result in the first case; sometimes by the use of the cut-back system, sometimes by a single act of a player in a scene, sometimes by the wording of a subtitle, and other ways far too numerous to be recorded here. In the second division, a "chase" in an automobile or aëroplane to rescue the heroine is "thrown in," and, while it doubtless excites some persons, there is not the same feeling aroused in the majority of spectators in a picture theater that there is when a worthy lover starts to leave his sweetheart's home, after a quarrel, when all pointed to their reconciliation. The whole interest of the spectators is centered on the young man, and if the scenario writer has supplied the actor with a clever plot, and if the player and his director are capable, no one watching

the unreeling of the picture will know what he is going to do. That is ideal suspense.

Several changes in the trend of the action within a scene are also productive of the "suspense" result. An example of this is Thanhouser's "A Newspaper Nemesis." A girl reporter has tricked a crook into taking her to his den and revealing to her his guilt of a crime which has baffled the police. Her sweetheart, a detective, has followed her, and as the crook attempts to embrace the girl the detective springs to her rescue. The crook's pal, however, enters, and knocks the detective down. When the crook turns toward the girl again, thinking nothing can stop him now, he finds that she has taken his pistol, and has him covered. The detective regains his feet, but is knocked down again by the crook's pal, and the crook, by a quick move, snatches the weapon from the girl's hand. At this juncture the detective floors the crook's pal with a well-directed blow, and wrests the pistol from the crook's hand just as the police arrive.

While we do not exactly approve of the action in this film, it serves as a splendid example of how suspense may be sustained by twisting the action in a scene. It would have been easy for the scenario writer to simply have the detective dash in, and, after a brief physical struggle with the crooks—which would probably arouse no suspense, because it has been done so often—rescue the girl. If our readers will look over some of their rejected scripts, which seem to have idea and plot, but which have never been smiled upon by the editors, they will prob-

ably find countless situations in which a stronger play for suspense could have been made. Possibly when the scripts have been changed, and this important element injected into them, the editors will find them acceptable.

In the actual writing of a script, the author has to depend upon his own ability. No one can stand at his side and say he must do this or must not do that, for the script would then belong to the person whose mind directed its formation.

In the mechanical preparation of a manuscript, however, direct instructions can be given the writer, for no original ideas are transferred. He is merely given a form to follow. While we do not doubt that the majority of scenarioists now submitting scripts have long since mastered this form, there are new writers entering the field daily, and we are inclined to think that some of the old-timers are tempted to be careless at times.

Those who have had experience at an editorial desk know what a relief it is to look over offerings which are in correct form, and, if the writer can train himself to think editorially and play for the favor of the editors on this and many other points, he is advancing another step on the rough road to success.

The requirements of a photo-play scenario are not many, and should easily be remembered by aspiring authors. First of all, manuscripts should be typewritten on one side of the paper only, the paper used being about eight and one-half by eleven inches. Longhand

was not under ban two years ago, but things have changed, and, with the many submissions which have to be considered, the majority of editors now read typed scripts only. The name and complete address of the author should appear in the upper left-hand corner of the first page, and the words "Submitted at your usual rates" in the upper right-hand space. This manner of submitting is given as an iron-clad rule because we consider it fatal for an amateur to set a price on his script.

In the center of the page—we are still on the first page—is the place the title should occupy, with an explanatory line beneath it, such as "A two-part drama of the Canadian Northwest." This is followed by a short, well-written synopsis. We see no reason for putting only synopsis and title on the first page, so we would continue right on down the blank space and put in the cast of characters, and then the scene plot, breaking the latter over onto the second page, if necessary. Then follows the scenario proper, or the scene action.

While it is not required by all the editors, it is a good plan to have the title of the play appear on each page of the manuscript, together with the number of the page. In case the scenario sheets are separated while in a studio, this will prove very beneficial, indeed. Clips may be used to hold the pages together, if desired, this being optional with the author. One thing that all those who submit should bear in mind, however, is that a neat-



appearing script is a pleasing sight to the editor's eye before he begins to read it. After that—it all depends!

We have devoted considerable space to this oft-told tale, but if we can lessen the burden of the weary editors, who daily have to “wade” through a stack of submissions from writers who do not follow this form, we shall feel that our effort has been well exerted.

#### APPRECIATING VALUES.

This is aimed at the man or woman who is writing on a “one-a-week” schedule, but who is selling closer to the “one-a-year” plan. If you don't belong in that class, don't read this—unless you have nothing else to do.

If a man paused on the corner to light his pipe, which he would smoke about ten minutes, and, in trying to shield the flame of the match from the wind, burned one of the gloves he was wearing, costing about two dollars, so badly that he had to discard it, wouldn't you say, without hesitation, that it was a case where the game wasn't worth the candle?

Certainly you would. But wouldn't you be just as likely as not to hurry home and spend half an hour “developing” a plot, and then spend your spare time for three or four days, or maybe a week, writing the actual scenario for it? We won't say “certainly you would” here; you can answer the question for yourself. We would suggest, however, that you frankly ask yourself if you are sure you can appreciate the relative value of the two component parts of a scenario—plot and technique. The man destroyed something of value over

mere nothing, in our example. Aren't you doing the same thing when you exert thought and labor over the technical treatment of an undeveloped plot?

#### THE SCENARIO MARKET.

Despite the fact that from many sources the word has been given out that it is no use for an amateur to try to get a script "across," it is an actual fact that at the present time the market for both dramatic and comedy scenarios is as promising as it has been at any time during the past two years.

Certain editors of picture pages on daily papers in various parts of the country have recently published near editorials in which they asserted that the man or woman who attempted to write a motion-picture play was wasting valuable time, for the editors were not accepting any outside contributions whatever. This is entirely wrong. Except in one or two cases, due to peculiar editorial policy, we feel safe in asserting that every company making regular program pictures will welcome worthy contributions and reasonably reward all authors whose works fit their needs.

While the writers of these "gloom" articles contend, and justly so, that the number of adaptations has more than doubled within the past six months, we take issue with them on the statement that this leaves no room for original work, except such as is done by the staff writers. It is not our intention to open an argument on the question, but we feel that if such an idea is generally accepted, many beginners, for whom the work offers

a future, will become discouraged completely or else take up some other line of literary endeavor, in which success may not await them.

The amateur should remember, however, that to gain the respect of the editors to whom he submits, he should be certain that every scenario sent in is really worthy of consideration. Because it is rejected by several studios does not mean it is useless, though there must be something wrong. After comparing it with the worthy productions he sees on the screen, and being satisfied it is as good as them, he should send it on its rounds. There is a good market for good scripts right now, and we venture to predict that within a short time it will be even better.

#### FINDING THE HUB.

The next picture you see, consider the plot as a wheel and the incidents and situations as the spokes. Then try to find the hub. Possibly you will find this a little difficult at first, but if you think over the story as a whole, and try to write down in as few words as possible what transpired within it, you will probably discover the hub.

It is the main situation, around which the entire story is woven. All picture plays in which the dramatic action is focused on a single climax have a hub. Sometimes one finds its way to the screen which contains two almost equally important climaxes. This is as much out of proportion as a wheel would be with two hubs.

After you have studied the screen and learned how



important it is to the success of a photo play to have a hub, go over your own scripts and be sure that they all contain one—and only one—and see to it that it is strong enough to interest any class of audience. If you are inclined to wander into bypaths in developing your plots, remember that concentration leads to effect.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TITLE.

The title of a photo play is a very important element from the time the author writes it at the head of his scenario until the film's life is over. The first place the selling power of the title is to be noticed is in the editorial offices of the studios. Almost every editor will read a scenario bearing an interesting title with far more enthusiasm than he will one whose title promises nothing. Then, too, where two scenarios seem equal in merit and only one can be purchased, the title is the thing which will probably help settle the question.

Looking beyond the production end, however, it must be remembered that the title is still an important element, perhaps even more so than it formerly was. Many exhibitors book films from titles, while the public, who sees nothing but a poster of the film and sometimes an announcement of who plays in it, is largely influenced by the title.

Every writer should see, therefore, that the titles he places on his scenarios are given serious consideration. They should never be very long, and should contain an appeal by suggesting something dramatic. They must also bear directly on the story, for it is very disappointing

to be lured into a theater by a title you think deals with a certain type of story and then find an entirely different story on the screen, containing nothing at all which warrants the use of the title it bears.

#### CHARACTERIZATION IN THE PHOTO DRAMA.

It is an actual fact that in numerous photo dramas being produced at the present time the personality of the leading players shines through their characters. This is unfortunate, for the condition does not exist so prominently on the speaking stage, but just whose fault it is is quite a question. The writer, director, and players all try to characterize the various parts in every photo play they work upon, but apparently the conflicting ideas of the three creators results in a conventional hero or heroine with the personality of the player who interpreted the rôle, plainly visible throughout.

The author is undoubtedly handicapped, for all he can work with is action. In short stories he can revert to description and dialogue, this making the creating of a character's personality a comparatively simple matter. The director works under a handicap, inasmuch as he must "sense" what the writer means in many places in a scenario. The players, in turn, get their conception of their rôles largely from the director.

It seems to us that the authors can do much to remedy this weakness if, instead of creating merely heroes and heroines with a fairly distinctive personality, they make every one of the persons who appear in their scripts live, red-blooded, distinct human beings. It may mean

a little more work, and it will doubtless take us some extra space in the scenario proper, but we think it would easily be worth the energy expended.

There are plays without number released which do not come under this heading at all, and if all writers will make it a point to study these carefully, whenever they find one, they will see the great amount of "business" each player has assigned to him or her, and also how everything that is done by a player further distinguishes the character from his or her personality, so that before a great deal of the film has been unreeled the player's art is lost sight of, and the audience is following the fortunes of a "human" screen character.

#### THE COMEDY-DRAMA.

Slowly but surely the comedy-drama seems to be coming into its own upon the motion-picture screen. Of late several multiple-reel features of this type have been done successfully, and here and there on the regular programs they have also crept in.

It seems to us that there is no real reason why comedy-dramas, which are also known as dramatic comedies, or dramas with a comedy relief, should not be ideally suited to the screen. To be sure, it requires more skill and effort to blend the dramatic and comedy elements together than to make a "straight" picture of either of the divisions, but the result seems to be worth the trouble. It is a certainty that the average audience would welcome more of this variety, and it is as sure a bet that the exhibitors would be glad to book such films in one and

two reels to maintain a balance on a program where a dramatic feature and a farce comedy appear.

We must admit that when a production is rushed, from the time the author conceives the idea for its scenario to the time the director finishes cutting it, it would show up worse on the screen if it were a comedy-drama than if it were straight comedy of any class or straight drama or melodrama. Therefore, we presume that under the present condition it would be well to look upon these comedy-dramas more as a luxury, when we are writing our scripts, than as a means of "cashing in" regularly.

Until there is a larger market for one and two-reel scenarios of this kind we would advise writers not to create them to the exclusion of the more salable farce, straight drama, comedy, and melodrama, but we want to go on record as saying that we are for the comedy-drama on the screen, and without hesitation we predict that the authors who can supply working scenarios for this type of screen play will register not a few sales within a comparatively short time.

#### TOOLS OF THE TRADE.

Presuming that you have a typewriter and are anxious to begin turning out scenarios, but before you start you wish to learn just what supplies you will need in the new work, we are going to offer a few suggestions.

First of all comes the question of paper and envelopes. We believe the best thing for an amateur to do is to get a box of plain white paper, of the required size, eight and one-half by eleven inches, and a package of yellow sec-

ond-copy sheets—which we believe will cost about fifty cents per five hundred. The white paper varies in cost, according to the grade used. Lighter paper is cheaper, but it is not advisable to get it too light for script work, as it will not stand the wear very well. We believe, after many experiments, that Nos. 10 and 11 Manila envelopes are the best for use in mailing scenarios. They are also rather inexpensive, being only eight or ten cents per package. While some writers have their names printed on their envelopes and stationery, we believe that an amateur, seeking to reduce expenses at every turn, will be more pleased if he buys a rubber stamp with his name and address molded on it, for something less than fifty cents, and becomes his own printer.

Every scenarioist should also have a liberal supply of carbon paper and keep a copy of every script written. These carbon copies are made on the yellow sheets, and should be kept in an ordinary file, where they can be classified according to titles. Another file—a scrapbook serves just as well—should be kept for plot ideas, almost-finished plot structures, incidents, impressions, et cetera. Then a list of the scenario markets, revised up to the minute, should be close at hand, as should a book in which a complete record of everything which has happened to all the writer's scripts since they were finished. In other words, where they were submitted, whether they sold or were returned, and all notes regarding their sale or rejection obtainable. One more tool is advisable—a



flatiron. It is not necessary to rush out and buy one right away. Next time a script looks shabby ask your mother, wife, or landlady to lend you one, if you are a man, or go to the laundry and help yourself if you are a woman. Then place the shabby script on a regular ironing board and give it a thorough going over. When you finish, it will be almost as crisp as though it were newly typed, unless it is so hopelessly wrinkled that the ironing has no effect.

Before we leave this subject we want to include paste, shears, and a boot knife in the list of necessities.

#### REWRITING PLAYS FOR PRACTICE.

Do you ever try to rewrite a picture play, either from the screen or from the synopsis the manufacturers send out? It is excellent practice, for if nothing else it will teach you how easy it is to bend and twist plots.

Often we take the plot of a screen story and allow it to run as it did in the original production, to a certain point. Then we forget all about how it ended, and say to ourselves: "Now, if this had not happened, how would it have ended?" As a result, our mind generally formulates an entire new plot, for the finish we created gives rise to a new beginning. Amateurs are liable to make a crude effort to change a plot and then pass it off as their own; so we would advise that scenarios having this source as their inspiration are not sent to the editors, unless the writer, after laying the newly created plot aside for a couple of weeks, is firmly convinced, upon taking it up again and comparing it to the original story,

that it is entirely different. Then he is at liberty to submit it where he pleases, for it is his own.

Our advice to those new at the game, however, is to do this kind of work not for immediate financial profit, but as a drill in plot building. We think that few stories, rebuilt every week, would prove very beneficial to young writers, though, of course, it is preferable to work on original scenarios if the time you can devote to writing does not allow both.

After you have become fairly familiar with the process we think you would find some scripts in your discard file which might become real live wires if the same treatment were applied to them.

ARE YOU A CRITIC, FAN, OR STUDENT?

Do you go to the picture show to see how your favorite star will look in North-woods costume, or how he will make love to his new leading lady, or do you go to see if the continuity of scenes does justice to the strength of the story?

It seems to us that the majority of scenario writers are also fans, and are inclined to be critics of minor details on the screen. We do not wish to give the impression that it is impossible for a person who expects to write for the screen to enjoy picture shows. On the contrary, we believe that the insight a person secures into the work while studying the silent art makes the shows ever so much more enjoyable. The point we are driving at, however, is that if a writer expects to learn from the screen—and it is a great teacher—he must not

watch the acting, settings, or photography, or allow himself to be carried away by the leads' personalities during his study period. When he goes to a theater determined to study, he should watch only what the scenario consisted of in one particular play. Then enjoy the others on the bill as he pleases.

ADVANCING.

If your first position was in a country store, and you liked it so well that you never had any desire to leave, you would probably be a country-store clerk when you were an old man. If you saw no future for yourself in the store, however, and studied salesmanship, you would probably go on the road eventually.

All of you must have had some advancements in life, and we believe that if you look back you will find that they were the result of your own determination to succeed. If you do not seem to be getting ahead in the scenario field, and feel that it is a hopeless game, look back over what you have done. Wasn't there something you did a year or two ago, which you did not consider very important at that time, but which acted as a welcome boomerang?

Every time you write a script you are climbing one step closer to the top, and it is only by never wavering in your determination to succeed that you can receive your reward for what you have already done. Circumstance plays a mighty important rôle in all walks of life, but in the scenario game the man who will finish on top is the man who takes a broad view of life, and does



not allow himself to become discouraged because failure seems to be everywhere and success only a dim future possibility. Remember that "as a man thinketh so he is."

WATCHING THE DRAMA.

There are many things which have been added to the art of producing motion pictures within the last few years which originally belonged to the speaking stage. While stage technique is familiar to most writers, many new angles of it appear every season, and it is well for the more advanced writers to keep an eye on it in regard to its appropriateness for motion pictures.

We refer to dramatic effects only. An example is "Under Cover," the play of the custom offices in New York City. The leading character goes through the entire play until the last act without the audience guessing that he is a government inspector rather than a smuggler. The clever painting of the character and the arrangement of the plot, so as to spring a complete surprise, has been used by a writer, and the subject done from his scenario was recently released by one of the Western manufacturers. In no way was "Under Cover," the play, touched, but the basic foundation of its technical treatment was adapted to the screen and proved very successful.

The danger in drawing from the stage, however, lies in the fact that an amateur is liable to try it, and, not being able to distinguish between actual plot and dramatic effects, will take a portion of a story, or even a whole plot, and try to sell it as a photo play. This should not be

done, though if an incident suggests an entirely different play, you surely are entitled to use it. If you feel you are thoroughly versed in distinguishing the difference between plot and technique, study the plays on the speaking stage closely, and you may be able to gain inspiration for a new and startling dramatic effect which has not been used before in pictures.

#### VISITING A STUDIO.

Some place in the back of your head, haven't you writers who have never been within a studio the desire to visit one? It seems almost an invariable rule that about three or four months after a man or woman begins to write, the "studio fever" comes on, and they feel that it is no use trying to turn out screen plays until they have actually seen them made.

This is not the case. If you have imagination you can realize that the players must go through the actions you call for in each scene, that each interior must be filmed in a set, that the exteriors are taken out of doors, and that what the director wants from the writer is a working script, with complete, concise directions of just what happens in each scene, providing the scenario and plot are well built themselves, of course. The thing which should really interest the writer is the plot. It would not exactly be throwing away three or four days to go to a near-by city to visit a studio, or, if you live in a city where pictures are made, to visit the studio three or four times a year, but we think that if you devoted this time to perfecting your plotting the result

would be far more beneficial. A studio visit is a help, but is not absolutely necessary to gain success.

EXPENSE.

Bear in mind when writing that interior sets are not the only expensive things in producing. Don't call for too much trick camera work, a large number of extra people, overexclusive exteriors, or a cast of too many principals. These things are liable to keep your script from ever reaching a director.

ADVANCED TECHNIQUE.

We recently saw one of the episodes of a serial which has become well known, and in it appeared a scene which gave us food for thought. A woman—the leader of a band of crooks—determined to frighten an heiress into leaving the country so her millions would pass into the hands of the crooks. To gain her end she masked as a ghostlike creature and visited the girl's home at night. Climbing to the heiress' second-story room by means of a ladder, she entered through a partly opened window.

This was all shown on the screen clearly, but when the interior of the room with the heiress seated in a chair appeared, the ghostlike creature was dissolved into the picture and then out. The following scenes showed the female crook descending the ladder and making her get-away.

We at once declared that the director had bungled the job, but upon thinking the matter over in our study that evening a great light struck us. It was advanced technique. The audience knew that it was the woman crook

all the time, but the scene in which the visionlike figure appeared was given from the heiress' point of view—as it appeared to her. While it did not quite harmonize in this picture, it can easily be seen that on numerous occasions the accepted technique can be played with by experienced writers and directors to gain certain effects, not only along this line, but also in various other directions. When doing this, however, the creator of the change is running the chance of getting into the difficulty short-story writers frequently do when seeking to “cover up” a portion of a plot so that they may later spring a surprise—the changing of viewpoint. Some may never have seen the viewpoint in pictures, but it certainly exists. And when it is changed abruptly is easily noticed even by those knowing nothing of technique.

#### SPEED OR EFFICIENCY?

Before a word can be said about the number of scripts an author should write in a month, when he is breaking into the game, a more important question must be considered.

Can an amateur restrain himself or herself enough to destroy or file away scenarios which were written merely for practice? We do not think this is possible, except in rare cases. The moment a beginner has finished a scenario he or she cannot rest until it is in the mails and on the way to the studios.

Under these circumstances we should say that an amateur should write no more than one a month, or, better still, only one every six weeks. This means that the

script must be considered and reconsidered, built up and torn down, until the writer feels certain it is worthy of consideration. On the other hand, if a writer feels he or she can trust himself or herself to destroy the practice efforts, we would advise writing one or two every week. In either case it is our firm belief that if a beginner submitted a script only once a month, or even exceeded the six weeks' delay limit occasionally, there would be a marked development in the ranks of photoplaywrights as a whole, for the material sent in would improve—it being the cream of each writer's work.

In writing for practice a writer will probably develop many interesting incidents and situations which can be used later in plays which are to be submitted. When the story is discarded these should be preserved, filed away in the "plot vault," and improved when the time for using comes.

#### EACH SCRIPT JUDGED ON ITS MERITS.

Do all those who are trying to write know just how an editor looks upon a script? We have often wondered if they did. When a scenario arrives—granting it is from one of the thousands of unknowns who are trying to succeed in the script game—the editor has nothing but the typed sheets of paper telling the story to guide his decision. He knows or cares nothing about the person who wrote the script. He or she may be rich and influential or may belong to the directly opposite class. The writer may have lived life in many of its varied forms in foreign lands, or may be the occupant



of a little, dingy room at night and a clerk in a department store during the day; he or she may have worked for years to master technique of one of the other branches of art, or the script may be the first fictional effort of a beginner; the writer may have done big things of which the editor has never heard, or he or she may feel that in the future big things can be done. These and a thousand other things mean absolutely nothing to the editor. If the story is there he will leap with joy, for he has discovered another live wire. If it is merely an "effort" it goes back into the basket for the mail clerk to return.

A beginner should realize these things and put his very best work into every script which is submitted. We willingly admit that there is a great difference when an editor sees a name on a scenario which he recognizes as being well known in some other line of literary endeavor or belonging to one of the writers he has been buying from regularly. These are read with much more care, but they are by no means presold. Like all the rest, they have to come up to the standard set by the man who passes judgment on them, but the mere fact that they bear the names they do gives promise that they probably will fill the requirements. Very often the editors are surprised. Agreeably so in the case of unknowns, and otherwise in the case of "knowns."

#### TRAINING FOR THE MENTAL GRIND.

We know a writer who can sit down at a machine and stay there for four or five hours at a stretch, and



then, after a half hour's rest, go right back and duplicate the performance. When a budding scenarist meets such a man he will immediately attempt the same feat, and will probably succeed in sticking the required time, if he can spare it from other work, but we would hate to read the stuff he turns out. You see, a beginner doesn't seem to realize that all things must be developed, or if he does realize it he don't think it applies to scenario writing.

Some persons will never be able to stand a long grind at the machine, while to others it will come with only a little practice. Those who can train themselves to stand it are indeed fortunate, for it is one of the big elements in the money-making plan of a professional. Probably nothing a writer could do would give better training along this line than newspaper work. We remember, in our "feature page" days, how we strolled into the office on Saturday afternoon and was told that another form—four pages—had been added to the magazine section for the following day, to make room for an exceptional feature story of local interest, and that it was up to the man who had charge of this section and myself—as his assistant—to supply the remaining three pages. We "grabbed one page out of the air," meaning we found available copy in the office, and each of us sat down to "grind out" a page fake story to fill the gap. We wrote a Civil War story a soldier in the National Home of that city had told us during the week, and we certainly stretched and stretched to make it cover the

page. It was about three in the afternoon when we began, and by seven we both turned in the copy.

Such an experience is not infrequent in newspaper work, especially among reporters, and things of this kind harden the writer to stand the strain of the "mental grind" when he turns out scenarios or fiction. We advise beginners to learn just where they stand on this—how long they can do good work at a single sitting—and then gradually train themselves to work longer and longer, until they are capable of finishing a script in a rush if it is needed.

At first a beginner will probably find that he or she can work intelligently just so long. Then the brain begins to tire, and all that is written after that suffers in accordance. If a writer aims to occupy a staff position in some studio later on it is really essential that the mind be trained to stand a long strain, for the "rush assignments" received by the men getting salaries from the various companies are many, and to retain their position the work must always be of the best quality. Therefore, begin now to train your brain so that when the time comes for it to stand the "grind" it will be ready.

#### TALKING FACTS.

Why should a man or woman who has been writing five or six months become discouraged? We hammered every studio that we knew to be reputable for eight months before we sold a script. And we didn't tell any one at home that we were trying to sell. We just

worked along night after night because we felt that it was within the scope of our ability to succeed.

Are all you amateurs doing that? The chances are that many of you are doing almost the same, but we know that many who have told their friends that they were planning to write a big picture success are growling because the editors fail to realize that they are being offered a "masterpiece." If you are not in the latter class the rest of this article does not interest you; if you are, please read on.

Just as an experiment quit writing, growling, talking, or whatever you may be doing during the time you think you devote to scenario work and take yourself over to a corner all alone. Then begin to think over the situation.

Is there any reason under the skies why you should register an immediate sale? Have you worked long and earnestly, applying intelligence to all you wrote and studied? Do you think you have mastered plot and technique to such an extent that you can talk, without danger of saying something foolish, to a man or woman who understands every angle of the game as it exists to-day? Do you notice an improvement in your work—if you have written more than one "masterpiece"? And, above all, do you really think that you are fitted to do the work, or do you lack that all-important requirement—imagination?

When you have honestly answered each of these questions you will probably realize that you are merely "learning how," and you will awake to the fact that it is just

as important that you study and work on the photo play, with no immediate reward promised, as it is that you work and study during your school days, with apparently no remuneration. If you decide honestly that you can succeed, and begin to work again, determined to go to the top, we will bet that you win out.

Every script that is out represents the possibility of a sale, but what is one sale compared to enduring success in the field? It is better to continue to work and study without paying any attention to acceptances or rejections, and sending out only the best, until you feel you have reached a position where you are capable of doing good work steadily. If you have judged yourself correctly at that time—and it is to your great advantage to do so—you will probably find that the studios cannot see too much of your work.

The foregoing was written with very serious intent, and we hope that those who read it will have no difficulty in catching the meaning we wished to convey, for we believe it touches upon one of the most vital obstacles in the path of a beginner to-day.

#### PRODUCERS LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE.

The little bird has whispered that three or four well-known Eastern producers have gone on record as saying that the question of securing material for future photo plays is becoming more and more serious every day. These men see that the supply of books, plays, and short stories fitted to the screen cannot last forever and that the scenario writers must be developed until they can



supply really big plays. Mr. Scenarioist, do you realize what an important part you may be called upon to play in the film game in the near future, and are you preparing to surprise those who have just been awakened to your growing importance?

NOT A SUBJECT FOR ARGUMENT.

A free-lance scenario writer, who has not the opportunity to meet persons in other lines of the motion-picture industry, probably never hears any one say that the creation of the scenario is not the most important element in the success of a celluloid drama, but those who live in cities where films are made and who associate with people in all branches of the industry hear many disputes over the question of what branch of the creating, distributing, and exhibiting ends of the business is most vital to its success.

When you are near an argument of this kind, step aside if you would avoid a lot of useless talking. The scenario writer, the director, the camera man, the film magnate, the exhibitor, the exchange man, the actor, and each of the others who do a "bit" toward presenting the films for public approval, are absolutely necessary to one another, and, while it must be said that some of them are more responsible for a picture's success than others, none could very well do business without the other.

Be sure that you, as a scenario writer, believe with your whole heart and soul that you are the backbone of the industry and write your scripts accordingly. But keep your belief to yourself, for you have nothing to

gain by trying to convince any one else—except the magnates, and they haven't time to listen.

#### TOO MANY IRONS IN THE FIRE.

While it is advisable to always keep three or four unfinished plays on hand to work upon, it behooves us to caution the beginner not to get too many started at the same time. The effect will be anything but beneficial to your "sales department," as it is a certainty you will not be able to make each of them novel and full of interest. It is best to learn from experimenting just how many you are capable of giving your attention to in rotation and then see that you keep this number in the course of making all the time.

#### SKETCHING YOUR PLOT.

Don't think that "plot" is some concrete thing that walks around the edge of your script after it is finished or exists in human form without being seen.

The cry of agony that comes from an amateur's lips oftener than any other is "What is a plot?" The worst of it is that when the amateur is given a definition to the best of the ability of the person asked, he is never satisfied. There is still that vague feeling in the amateur's bones that the "plot" is the magic something that must be pursued through space until it is captured.

Why not come down to earth and do a little clear thinking? "Plot" is simply a handy name for the rough sketch or outline of your story. It may be compared to the framework of a building, which will later be filled out and rounded into a beautiful structure.



If you sit down to write a letter in which you wish to tell the person you are writing to several items of interest in a certain order, you would probably make a note of the various items upon a piece of paper and then write about each fully in its order. Do you get the comparison? The notes were your plot; the letter your finished script.

In sketching your plot for a scenario the same principle is applied, but, of course, the outline becomes ever so much more complicated.

#### KNOWING THINGS.

We have always firmly believed that to gain lasting success in any business a person must know a great deal about said business.

When a person starts to write a scenario he is entering the motion-picture business, and we believe it is necessary to gain a "working knowledge" of the industry in general if one intends to continue turning out salable scripts.

It is necessary to immediately learn just what market conditions are as regards selling scripts, but when we started we also tried to find out all we could about selling films—that is, from the manufacturers' point of view. Then there are a thousand-and-one other things about the industry which can be picked up here and there by studying the trade journals closely, and we believe that learning all these things is one of the surest ways of entering the gateway on the road to lasting success.

This does not apply to players particularly, though it is well to keep an eye on them and their ability, as we have stated before, so we presume that those who are inclined to be "fans," as well as writers, will not be overpleased. However, there is nothing to prevent you from being a member of both classes if you so desire, only don't try to be both at the same time, while a picture is on the screen or while you are reading film lore.

#### WRITING SYSTEMATICALLY.

Do you go at your work in a businesslike manner or do you take it hit and miss? It doesn't pay in writing fiction of any kind to be too cut-and-dried, but it does pay to get results in as direct a way as possible. We have three general divisions to our work of writing a scenario, though this system can be offered merely as a suggestion, as we believe a writer gets better results by formulating his own working methods.

At any rate, here is our way: First comes sort of a selection of material. We get together the nucleus of the story. Then we go over it and frame the plot, discard what we do not want and add what we think is needed. This step takes the longest, for when we finish it the story is complete and ready for the third and final step—the scene development of the applying of technique.

This method has always proved effective and speedy for us, and if any of our writer-readers think they can use it, we're sure they are welcome.

SPECIALIZING.

Do you write drama or comedy most successfully? When you have settled this question in your mind it would be well to give most of your time to the selected class of writing, not neglecting to write one of the other class occasionally, however, to keep from getting rusty.

By doing scenarios of one class most of the time a person who is not versatile by nature is liable to get into the rut, but, on the other hand, practically all the big writers in the fiction field have made their reputation by writing one kind of stories most of the time. We believe when the photo-playwright becomes recognized there will rise masters of the various classes of scenarios who can, nevertheless, turn out a script of any variety if called upon to do so.

USING THE DAILY PAPER.

In the search for plot material, we believe nothing offers more help than the daily papers. While we gather our material wherever we find it and make the paper just one hunting ground, we find that the reporters have been our best little aids. Of course, you all know that the great drawback in using items which have appeared in the newspaper is that every one else who reads the paper, and who is inclined to write scenarios, has the same privilege of "lifting" the news story that you have. Therefore, it will have to be twisted and revamped until it appears to be almost entirely original. We use them more as a means of suggesting things, than we do as concrete incidents or situations.

It might be said here that it makes no difference whether the story is run under a "scare" head on the first page or whether it occupies three or four lines on the last. If you are capable of using it intelligently in your own work—that is, making it seem different—you can take it and cease worrying over the number of others who will find and use it. If you do not shape it to suit yourself, however, but instead use it as the reporter described it, you are hopelessly out of running on the front-page story, and will probably learn that many other writers besides yourself have used the three-line item on the last page. It reverts us to what we are wont to say every now and then—if you wish to sell scripts, create them; if you wish to have them rejected, merely copy something which has been handed you in ready-made form.

We wrote two scenarios and one short story from clippings of the sinking of the *Titanic*, and not the slightest suggestion of a sinking ship appeared in any one of the three creations. Incidents mentioned in reports suggested dramatic situations, and two of these situations were planted in the Canadian north woods, where they quickly worked into a plot. The other became a society play. Had we thrown a shipwreck into these idea germs we would still be spending postage on them.

#### CHANGING THINGS AROUND.

Recently while waiting for a car on a corner, a police patrol suddenly drove up, and out of the corner cigar

store a plain-clothes detective emerged with his prisoner. It was a surprise to every one around the corner, because no one knew that one of the men in the cigar store was under arrest.

After the two men entered the patrol and it disappeared down the street, the incident seemed fitted to a photo play. No doubt the average photo-playwright would have also seen some possibilities in it, but most probably the plot he would evolve would deal with criminal life.

Here is what it suggested: A country girl has always lived a quiet life, her only enjoyment being keeping two lovers "on the string." Suddenly some great, unexpected change comes into her life which makes her a completely different type of person, and, after her adventures border on tragedy, the worthy one of her two lovers brings her back to happiness.

Many of you will doubtless fail to get the connection between the plot thus roughly outlined and the man being taken away in a patrol. It was merely the mental impression the incident left, because of its unexpectedness. By wondering what effect it would have, had it been closer to home life, was born the country girl and the sudden tragedy in her life.

This is, of course, far from a photo play now, and before it is entitled to technical scenario treatment it may be entirely changed around again. We mention it merely to show how amateurs may get away from



the conventional. Many plots may be derived from everyday incidents.

STOP IT!

The more nonselling free lances we talk to the less we wonder why there are so few exceptional photo plays. It is this class of writers, who should be working hard and earnestly to try to master the craft, that are largely responsible for the slow rise of the screen dramatists. Day after day you hear them "beefing" about present conditions, individual failures, et cetera, when they should be writing and thinking.

We do not condemn photo-playwrights as a whole, you must understand—or even this particular class, for they can reform when they so desire—but in justice to the many hard-working, silent writers it seems to us that it is time this other class stepped "off stage." There is nothing to be gained by telling every one you talk to how the photo-playwright is made a "goat" by the film industry. If you wish to do something for the cause in general, dig in and turn out such good plays that the manufacturers will be forced to recognize you.

If every writer in the country has this incentive to work for and is honest with himself in judging the quality of his work, we think that within a short time we will see larger prices paid for original work and more credit given to the author thereof. At any rate, we wish each of our readers would do his share toward accomplishing something and at the same time try to convert the "beefers."



## REALIZATION.

Recently we visited a studio and were surprised when we were introduced to a writer whose name has been attached to two or three stage productions which have met with Broadway approval, and who has lately become a staff writer in the studio.

"Do you know," said the writer, whose name we are not at liberty to mention, "until six months ago I always considered scenarios just what the name implies—rough sketches of plots? When I settled down to study all the ins and outs of photo-playwriting, though, I sure was amazed at how much there was to be learned."

We didn't comment on the subject, but possibly we smiled. This writer has realized just what the screen drama is, and he is but one of many fictionists and dramatists who have done the same thing or who will do it in the near future. Ever since motion pictures left the "fad" class, writers of fiction and drama have considered entering them, but in practically every case in a light way. They don't know what they are tackling when they attempt to write a picture play, and they have the false idea that if they do write a good one they will not be well paid for it.

We look forward with anticipation to the time when the really big writers from other fields will invade the ranks of the silent dramatists, equipped thoroughly with knowledge of the subject. Amateurs undoubtedly fear such an invasion, as it will hurt their chances for a time, but in our opinion it will be a godsend to the beginner,

as it will mean the realization by the film world that the photo-playwright is an important element. When the amateur masters his art, then he will be ready to reap real rewards, whereas now the highest prices go to the man with a literary reputation.

Looking back over the past year, it is easy to see that the field is being entered slowly but surely by men who have mastered the technique of other lines of literary endeavor and who possess real creative ability. During the coming year many more will doubtless realize scenario writing is worthy of serious consideration, and will do as the writer who suggested this article did, study all its "ins and outs" thoroughly.

DON'T WRITE A SERIAL!

Just because you have an idea that you think would make a fine serial, don't sit down and waste gray matter plotting out fifteen or twenty two-reel episodes. An outside writer hasn't one chance in a hundred of having a serial produced, even if he should write a good one, which is not probable unless the outsider is a thoroughly experienced writer.

We think that until a writer is sure of himself and has several sales to his credit, the two-reel script should be his limit. Three reels or more require a plot which few beginners can create, and we think that these longer films should be left to the older writers.

If an amateur spends four or five months working out the scene action for a serial scenario which he feels

is a winner, and then finds no market for it, it is liable to have a serious effect on his whole photo-playwriting career. Aside from this danger, there is also the handicap of working on one subject for such a long period, when various plots might have been handled, and something new learned from each.

#### A NEW EFFECT.

D. W. Griffith, the Mutual director, who is responsible for so many of the effects which make motion pictures so interesting, recently introduced a new one. In tense, dramatic scenes he photographed a large close-up of the actor's or actress' face only, using a mask over part of the lens of the camera.

With capable players this is a splendid means of securing a grip on an audience that could never be obtained otherwise, but in writing a scenario we think we would hesitate about putting it in, as not all players are equal to such a trying portrayal of emotions.

While the writer may not use a new effect of this kind very often, it is well to remember it, and if an opportunity offers itself later, to take advantage of it. In cases of this kind, an author should use his own judgment. If he feels a player of ordinary ability can be convincing in the effect called for, he should use it; but if it is particularly exacting, it is well to try to do without it, as the players he knows can do it may not be with the company to whom he will eventually sell his script. A free lance has many markets, and his material must be versatile enough to supply the genera!

demand of all so that if he does not sell in the first place he may try the second or third.

STORY AND TECHNIQUE.

Most amateurs seem to realize that before they can expect to write a finished scenario they must learn the technique of the screen, but few seem to consider it necessary to learn how to create new stories before they can expect to sell.

Of the many stories received daily at all studios, over three-fourths are in passable technical form, but the stories they contain are nothing more than a rehash of what has appeared on the screen countless times. It is this that causes the editor to sigh wearily, after reading a carefully written, neat, and technically correct script, and then assign it to the "return" basket.

It is one of the most difficult things an amateur has to learn, and one which he seems unable to comprehend. We know that when we woke up to the fact that our stuff was conventional, we couldn't for the life of us tell how we could fix it. Technique is comparatively easy to master, because it really exists, but plotting is something that each writer must learn in his own individual way. An experienced writer can teach a beginner technique, just as a schoolmarm can teach a child spelling, but he can no more teach the same beginner plotting than the schoolmarm can teach the child how to digest its food. In both cases suggestions can be made, but they will really amount to very little.

The sooner a beginner sets out to master the story

end of the picture-play scenario, the sooner he will see his efforts on the screen. In the meantime, he must remember that the more perfect he can make himself in technique, without sacrificing his story, the more popular he will be with the editors and directors when he begins to sell.

#### COÖPERATION AT LUBINVILLE.

Just before the first scenes of Lubin's serial series, "The Road o' Strife," were filmed, Emmet Campbell Hall, the author, was called to Philadelphia from his home in Maryland, for a conference, and all those who helped make the pictures discussed it in detail.

Mr. Hall personally went over every rôle of importance with the player who was to play it, and explained his conception of the part. When the picture appeared on the screen, therefore, every character was an individual, and Director John Ince was saved the worry of keeping in mind just what each character had done in each episode, so that the players would not spoil the realistic effect of the film.

In "The Road o' Strife," Mr. Hall introduced a novelty, inasmuch as only one "straight" leader appears, all the others being in the form of dialogue. They also convey the inflection of the speaker's voice by either flashing abruptly on the screen, as in the case of "No!" or fading in and out slowly for a sentence containing a gentle statement.

It was Mr. Hall who originated the idea of the serial series in his "Beloved Adventure" pictures. Each install-



ment was distinct, but all placed together in fiction form by him made an interesting novel without a break in the continuity of the general plot. He has been writing for the Lubin Company for several years, and previous to his present connection wrote for Selig and Kalem.

#### VISUALIZING YOUR SCENARIOS.

It is not enough to have every action that appears in your scenario placed on paper to your own satisfaction. You must go over your finished scenario and visualize. Imagine you are in a picture-play theater, and that your subject is on the screen—scene for scene as you have written it.

As a spectator, is everything clear to you, and has the scenario been arranged so that it holds your interest from start to finish without faltering? Also, does everything lend itself to the scope of the camera, or have you called for something in some of the scenes which cannot be secured without a few additional scenes?

All this means brain work, and, in some cases, means the rewriting of a script to make the necessary changes, but a beginner should always keep before him the five words that are so true and mean so much in every line of endeavor: "Through failure is success achieved." Incidentally, it is more profitable to judge your own failures than to have others judge them for you.

#### THE ALL-IMPORTANT SYNOPSIS.

We often wonder just how many really worth-while scripts have been rejected because their authors could



not write an intelligent synopsis. The busy editor, reading his way through a stack of manuscripts on his desk, has no time to tell the writer that he thinks his weakness lies there. Mr. Editor is paid to get good stories for his company—and he has a very limited time in which to do it.

We believe that the synopsis of a scenario is of enough importance to warrant rewriting or revising it four or five times, until it fairly sparkles with clearness. Every vital point in the story should stand out so that a hasty reading will reveal it without difficulty. The way to gain this effect is to suppress useless details.

A bare but complete outline of an incident in a plot would read: John tries to rob the bank and is caught. A more detailed and unnecessary description would read: John arrives at the bank that night and breaks in. A policeman sees and follows him. The policeman traps John in the bank and places him under arrest.

We are willing to admit that there are cases where a more detailed synopsis than is indicated by the first example is required, but even in such cases it is well to aim at compression. Bear in mind that the synopsis is your advance agent, and unless it is a good salesman your script proper will not receive a hearing. Incidentally, we don't believe in setting a word limit on a synopsis, but if you merely describe your plot, and do that in the most concise manner possible, we think you will find yourself well inside the two-hundred-and-fifty or three-hundred-word so-called limit.

## DRAMATIC ACTION AND OTHER STUFF.

We presume many will not like the word "stuff" in the head, but we use it every day when we refer to the parts of photo plays where death struggles, cruelty, wild shooting affairs, et cetera, appear. We do not think these are any longer dramatic to the public, as they have seen them so often that they know just what is going to happen.

We will give two examples, and let you judge for yourself which you think would have the most effect on an audience. First comes "stuff." A poor man and his wife have quarreled. He returns home, and, when she speaks to him about drinking, he seizes her and treats her roughly, finally throwing her to the floor. Very dramatic? Second example: Same man and wife have quarreled. He returns home under influence of liquor, as in previous case. She pleads with him. He sneers at her. She portrays intense suffering by means of facial expressions. She continues to plead. He speaks roughly to her, then goes out. Close-up view to get all that is dramatic in her suffering; maybe real tears if the actress is clever.

Take your choice. We know there are many who will not agree with us that the latter is the most popular with the public at the present time, but we intend to stick to our choice. The fickle audiences grow tired of everything in time, therefore we agree that they want a change from "stuff" to dramatic action. We know of many editors who agree with us, and if the scenarioist

can write this kind of script we do not think he will search for a market very long, providing, of course, the script is otherwise O. K.

Directors, as a class, are friends of the writers, but the latter do not seem to appreciate this fact.

What was the most interesting moment in your life? There is a photo play somewhere near it, but don't take it just as it happened.

Not many picture plays are self-starters.

#### BREAKING IN.

It seems safe to say that all those who are now writing scenarios as free lances are desirous of breaking into the professional end of the game. We know many who say it is merely a pastime with them, but to write good scenarios is hard work, and the "pastime" impression does not last long. When we see a writer stick four or more months, we decide that he is trying to become a professional.

Granting that this is true, it seems too bad that more do not go at the thing in the right way. Some start with the idea that they must work, and work they do, but the work is not always intelligent. Others study technique till they become lost in the maze, and cannot form an original plot to save their necks. Still more believe there is some mystic key to be found which will enable them to sell all they write.

These three classes, we believe, are the most prominent

divisions of the amateurs who wish to be professionals. There are many other ideas on "how to break in," but they are held by comparatively few writers. Therefore, we will pass them up and delve deeper into the ailments of the trio of types we have mentioned.

First, the man who works. This class is probably the most promising, because, if nothing else, those in it are, in time, trained to the grind. The trouble lies in the fact that they believe they must turn out one script per week, or on some similar schedule, and sacrifice plot to accomplish this purpose. As a rule, their technique is not bad, for by constant writing they cannot help but learn the mechanical end of the script preparation. Our advice to those in this class is to quit writing altogether for a few weeks, and, when they return, to go at it in a more businesslike manner, seeing to it that everything that they send out is worthy of production in their own eyes, providing they can consider their own work without favoritism. If they cannot, we would suggest a few weeks' study of this alone, for it will be necessary to learn how to judge your scripts, in time, if the writer expects to remain in the game.

The second class, those who consider technique the most important element, will also profit by a short vacation. This class will worry and work over some split-hair question concerning the technical preparation of a script and entirely ignore the vital element—the plot. We would suggest that they spend their vacation study-

ing plots of all classes and kinds, never once considering the technical end of the silent drama. When they return to their own work we do not doubt but what they will see their mistake and get the proper proportion of the two elements which are so necessary in putting together a silent drama.

Now, the third class have the hardest route to travel, because they are farther from either plot or technique than the other two. Their time has been spent asking others how it is done, finding out how So-and-so succeeded, writing personal letters to editors, planning on what they will do to creep into the select circle, and, incidentally, doing a script now and then. They are the class who haven't started. We do not advise a rest for them; rather we believe that the sooner they begin to work the better. They have before them the danger of getting into either of the two classes just mentioned, though if they work along carefully, heeding the advice given to those in the former divisions, we believe they would soon begin to see light. They must forget all that they have done, however, for we doubt if any one working under the conditions described could have learned anything of real importance; they must wake their brain up, master technique in a sensible way, and then begin the great battle with plot; they must see that every script they turn out carries with it all that an editor is interested in; they must concentrate on what is before them and not dream of the future, and they must realize the fact that it is up to them to work out



their own salvation, regardless of how any other writer reached his present position.

WHAT MAKES A MULTIPLE-REEL SCRIPT.

Amateur after amateur has asked us what it is that makes a two or three-reel scenario different from a one-reel script, and to all we have simply said: "Because it is larger."

This answer seldom satisfies them, but it undoubtedly gives them something to think over. We don't see any other way of describing it. A single-reel script has to tell a story in a limited space. If written by an experienced author, who has the one-thousand-foot limit in mind, it generally contains just about enough action to cover the reel. This something we believe has to be sensed by the writer, and the way to acquire the ability to sense it is to study the pictures on the screen.

When you desire to write a two or three-reel scenario, or a longer one, if you are more experienced, there must be just so much more plot added to the idea, which must be larger than the single-reel idea, and the action must be given more careful development.

We recall a three-reel scenario a friend of ours sold, which was very popular when produced, because it contained no "padding." When written the first time it was in one reel, but had a big idea, and our friend rewrote it when he saw an opportunity to sell a larger script. He looked for possibilities within what he had already written, and found plenty of them. These he played up



strongly, and, after adding a little action here and there to give the story a nice "balance," he wrote it into proper form, keeping in mind the fact that it was to be a three-reeler, and not cramping himself in any place.

We believe that even an amateur can write an *acceptable* two-reel script from a *passable* one-reeler—if the proper thought is given to the treatment it receives. The trouble is that until the writer becomes familiar with the screen, he is liable to consider one reel of plot action sufficient for a three-reel scenario, and, therefore, draw a rejection slip.

#### FADES AND VISIONS.

Every now and then some one gets mixed up in the technical screen-play vocabulary, and mistakes a vision for a fade, or vice versa; and sometimes an amateur draws the wrath of the director who is producing his first accepted script, because he writes one in the scenario when obviously another is appropriate.

Of late, visions have been used less frequently than in the past, fades being the most versatile of the two. We believe that there is a place for the vision, and that its work should be different from that of the fade. However, that is another story, for our object is to point out just how the two may be written correctly in a script.

The vision appears within the scene, without the scene itself disappearing from the screen. For instance: If John were alone in his north-woods cabin, and his

thoughts drifted to Mary, whom he had left in the East, it would be written thus:

Scene 56.—Cabin interior, typical of north woods.—John seated in foreground, takes picture from pocket, looks at it, then looks off to side—Vision (in upper corner of picture)—Mary appears in vision and smiles toward John, then fades out. John sighs, et cetera.

In case we wished to put the same idea over with a fade, it would be written thus:

Scene 56.—Cabin interior, typical of north woods.—John seated in foreground, takes picture from pocket and looks at it longingly. Scene slowly fades into:

Scene 57.—Garden of Mary's home in East.—Mary seen in hammock. She smiles cheerily, and waves to some one off screen. Slowly fade back to:

Scene 58.—Back to 56.—Scene slowly fades in as John registers his longing for Mary, et cetera.

You see, one is essentially a scene by itself, while the other is not, though both have to be taken separate from the scene of which they are a part. We know several staff writers who do not use a separate number for a vision scene, but we think it is the best thing for an amateur to do. It leaves no doubt in a director's mind as to the effect the writer wished to secure; whereas, if it were all written within a scene, it might be worded in such a manner that it would puzzle him.

With the advent of the more finished picture, visions and fades are coming into their own, but an amateur

should remember it is not necessary to overdo them just because he knows how to "git 'em over."

#### A LASTING IMPRESSION.

When you see an exceptionally poor picture on the screen you are subconsciously prejudiced against the company which made it. If you see three or four poor ones by the same company you will probably stay away from your favorite theater whenever a film by that concern is advertised. On the other hand, if you see a picture which is so good that you remember it a long time after it has faded from the screen, you will probably watch eagerly for the next release by the company which produced it. If they repeat the good work, you become an ardent supporter of their brand, and will request your theater manager to get as many of their releases as possible. Isn't that a fact?

Not wishing to change the subject, we would like to state right here that, though editors are judges of each particular script sent them, and that script alone while it is in front of them, they, too, have a subconscious mind, and when a writer sends in one poor script after another, said subconscious mind does not particularly favor the writer. On the other hand, the author who turns out one good script after another creates the opposite impression.

The moral of this is the same as the one we touch upon directly, or indirectly, almost every week. We wonder how many of our readers know what it is, and how many of them are applying it—and being benefited?

## WRITING TO FIT A STAR.

We think it is a wise thing to pick a certain star out occasionally, and, after studying his or her work on the screen in three or four productions, write a play in which said star may shine.

We don't for a moment mean that because you admire a player you should write for him or her alone, but in time to come you may be called upon to write a scenario around some certain player—not necessarily the same one—and you will then know how to go about it. This suggestion also applies to other things, such as writing around a given event or a spectacular accident, et cetera. The latter scripts should be done only for practice, as the same accident or event would not be available for filming, but the "star script" might find a resting place with another company who thought it fitted their lead perfectly. At any rate, you've added something to your store of knowledge, and when you are called upon for a script of this style you will not be walking on untrodden ground.

## THE PHOTO-PLAYWRIGHT'S AUDIENCE.

We often wonder how many persons who are trying to write salable photo plays ever stop to consider how large their field is. They cannot help but dimly realize how many people attend the picture shows, because they see theaters crowded day after day; but the trouble is that they consider it merely as a part of the business, which holds nothing of interest for them.

According to evidence placed before the House Com-

mittee on Education, at Washington, D. C., there are about sixteen million persons who see motion pictures daily in the United States alone. Can you, Mr. Scenario Writer, honestly tell yourself that the play you are working on is of sufficient importance to entertain a large portion of this vast throng of pleasure seekers, and will each of them be better in some small way after seeing your play screened?

The figures given above should not frighten the beginner, but they should serve to make him realize that he is entering a work of importance. Stuff which is "dashed off," the only idea being to get through it, will hardly be worthy of the attention of the portion of the sixteen million to which it will play each day during its life—about five or six months; and we are not considering any country except our own.

When you are tempted to slight some part of your script, in the future, we think you will find it beneficial to recall these figures, and weigh your material carefully before placing it in your script.

#### TAPE-MEASURE PLOTTING.

The popular belief among amateurs who have not yet registered their first sale, and many who have disposed of a few scripts, seems to be that there are certain rules by which a plot's worth can be judged, and that this certain set of rules apply in their same form to every plot which has been or will be created.

This is not the case. There are many lax rules which govern proper plot building, but the greatest dramatists



who have ever lived are those who took pride in making and breaking their own plot laws. A plot has to be an outline of the story, and only the author himself can tell just how it is to be created and how much it is worth in comparison to what he intended to when he started. An outsider can look at what the author has written, and give his opinion as to whether or not the story compares favorably with others which have been presented to the public, but he cannot tell the author that which is hidden in the latter's subconscious mind, and which is needed to make the plot presentable.

We met an amateur recently who had four or five questions which he claimed, if applied to a plot, told him just what it was worth. We had just come from a picture show, and told him the plot of one of the plays we had seen on the screen. His questions didn't fit, for the plot was different from the ones to which he had previously applied the test. It convinced him that he couldn't measure plots by a single tape line.

We believed that every writer knows, 'way down in his heart, just what his plot is worth; and as to his judging its value on the surface, we can suggest nothing better than horse sense.

#### THE SURPRISE FINISH TO COMEDY DRAMAS.

Not so very long ago the American Film Manufacturing Company put out a two-reel picture called "The Castle Ranch," which was a splendid example of a two-reel comedy drama with a surprise twist at the finish.

Through the entire two reels nothing very exciting

happened, though the byplay held one's interest. About the beginning of the second reel it became obvious that something was *going* to happen, but no intimation of what it would be was given. The story carried along in this way until the last twenty feet, when the young Englishman, who had been "duped" into buying a worthless ranch, and then sold it back to the man who "duped" him when oil was discovered on it, calmly announced that he had "planted" the oil himself, in order to even scores with the crooked land agent.

There was nothing to suggest that the young Englishman knew what the oil was, or had any idea of its value, at the time of its discovery. Those who saw the picture will have to admit they felt a little sorry for him when the land agent again apparently swindled him. He showed no feeling one way or the other until he spoke the words of the leader which told of his cleverness, and then the picture almost immediately faded from the screen, leaving the audience laughing and whispering about the way they had been surprised.

We have mentioned the need of films of this kind, and are still firmly convinced that they are drawing cards. We know we will watch future offerings of this company with interest, hoping that we will again be treated to such an agreeable surprise; and we feel that many others will do the same.

Before leaving the subject, it would be well to caution writers that the comedy and drama must be well blended together, and that the surprise must enter naturally, and

not be "thrown" or "dragged" in. The true art of such a story is in concealing a plot element under the very noses of the audience, and in such a way that they will easily recognize it when it is disclosed at the finish.

#### SETS AND LOCATIONS.

Sets are, as the name suggests, interior settings in the studio, while locations are backgrounds in the open, against which scenes are taken. It is important that a scenario writer should learn to distinguish between them, and should be careful never to confuse them in his scripts. Sets are restricted to a limited number per reel, varying according to a company's policy; while locations are easy to secure, and a limit is seldom placed on them.

In sets, almost anything can be secured, from the cellar of a tenement to the palatial halls of the Vatican, if the company decides to expend the money. In locations, however, the director depends on natural backgrounds, and a tree overhanging a brook, or some such scenery, may not be securable near the studio.

It is well, therefore, to bear in mind the fact that interior sets must be used judiciously, because of their cost, while locations must be of a general variety, and not call for any special scenery. There are exceptions to both these rules, of course, even for the free lance. If a narrow, winding trail plays an important part in the plot of an author's story, he must gamble his chances of sale on the chance that such a location can be found in the studio to which the script is submitted; while

if an expensive set is expected to furnish the "selling punch" for the film, he must also gamble on the chance that the company is willing to spend money enough to "rig up" such an interior.

To the free lance just beginning to fight his way to the top, we think it is best to say: "Be moderate." This applies to both interior sets and exterior locations, for the easier your script is to produce the more chance it has of being accepted, all else being up to the standard of the company.

#### PRONOUNS.

How would you like to be an editor who, after reading through about two-thirds of a synopsis which promised to give you the best story of the week, became lost in a maze of "he," "she," "they," and "thems" which made the rest hopelessly confusing?

We believe you would do just as the editor has—return the story, and hope that the author will read it over himself and straighten it out.

You say you would write the author and tell him what was the matter? Oh, no, you wouldn't! Not if the general manager was due to call on you in ten minutes to talk over the adaptation you were working on, and three directors were waiting for scripts you were to put the finishing touches to as soon as you finished reading that last synopsis.

Th editor can concentrate on a submitted script only once, unless it is worthy of purchase, and then only while it is before him. After that, a hundred other things

claim his attention; and just because a script looked promising, as far as its synopsis was intelligently written, is no reason he will remember it and look it up when he is at leisure for a few moments later on.

We digressed from the subject of pronouns merely to illustrate the necessity for making everything clear in your synopsis. Edit this part of your script over and over, and rewrite it several times, if necessary. It is your salesman, and must be given the power to convince the editor that he must buy. The liberal use of pronouns in such a manner that they confuse the reader is one sure way of killing your chances for a sale. They may be used in many places, but the beginner is inclined to overuse them most of the time.

Look at your synopsis with the cold eye of an outsider, and if you then understand what the "he," "she," or "they" stands for, you may be satisfied the editor will also "get" it. If there is the slightest doubt in your mind, however, it is better to substitute the name of the character or characters, even though the sentence does not read quite so smoothly.

#### A BEGINNER'S MIND.

If you have just fifteen minutes to wait before meeting a friend, and decide you can finish up your script, or do a certain part of it, in that time, we feel safe in asserting the result will be unsatisfactory.

Unless your power of concentration is wonderfully developed, your mind—granting it is the mind of a beginner—will be on your engagement, and you will con-



stantly keep thinking: "I can do just so much more, and then I'll have to go."

The work will be all "surface stuff," and will show no real thought, as it would had it been written when your whole heart was in the work. We think it is better not to write under such circumstances, at least not until you have trained your mind so that while you are writing a script it will entertain no other thoughts.

Many professional writers have acquired concentration to such a marvelous degree that they can sit among a boisterous crowd and plot or write a touching and thoroughly human story. You must remember, however, that such writers have had years of training, and that their minds have been molded so that plotting and writing have become almost subconscious. Your mind must be trained, and it is indeed poor training to do one thing and think of another.

#### COMEDY AND OTHERWISE.

Don't think that because Charlie Chaplin can get a laugh every time he knocks some one down and jumps on him that all forms of physical abuse are essential elements to comedy. On the contrary, there are few actors who could do many of the things Chaplin and a few others do, and make them appear anything but brutal. We think that if you study the current farce-comedy pictures closely, you will find that the execution, not the action, is what gets the laugh.

**If you have a talent for writing farces, we advise you**

to spend your time drawing new types suited to burlesquing, and creating new situations of the comic variety, into which to run these characters, rather than inventing new ways of knocking a man senseless.

A good farce, free from objectionable features, will always be at home on the screen, for it draws real laughs. We think it is up to the photo-playwrights to change the present trend of farces, however, and supply material for a full thousand or two thousand feet of clever comedy, instead of allowing the producers to "fill in" part of a reel with "stuff" of doubtful intent. Just now, the writer of a farce-comedy can sell as often as he can deliver the goods, and this is one section of the scenario-writing game on which the concentrated efforts of the free lances could make an impression if they were rightly directed.

#### TAKE IT SLOW.

Scenario writing is a big game, and the sooner those who are trying to "break into it" realize this fact, the less discouragements they will suffer.

That sentence carries a thought which, though it probably seems trite to the older writers, is one every amateur who is just starting to write should remember.

"How can I learn to write scenarios that sell?" or "Tell me how to write successful photo plays," are generally the greetings a selling writer receives when he meets an ambitious person who thinks he would like to become a photo-playwright.

We wish that all our readers would tackle the propo-

sition in a different way. Make up your minds that you cannot succeed for a long, long time, and that you are going to learn how to write step by step. Then forget all about your typewriter, and visit picture shows. Study the screen. Learn just how every picture you see before you was put together. Try to reduce its plot to the author's basic idea, and then see how he built it up. Also get a fair knowledge of technique.

When you have passed out of the first grade—you are entirely your own master—then begin to plot out the ideas you have in mind, not neglecting to study the screen continually, however. When you are satisfied that your plot will adapt itself to the screen, and that it is both novel and fresh, write it into scenario form and submit it. You have then begun your fight for recognition. Continue to study, write, and submit, advancing slowly all the time, and do not waste time asking others how you can reach the top. That is a question only yourself can answer, and the answer is not in words but in work—the careful, steady work that counts in any line of endeavor.

#### KEEP THEM GOING ROUND.

Scripts should never be allowed to remain on a writer's desk for more than a day or two. If they are rejected by one company, they should be sent to another; if returned again, to still another; and so on until the writer either decides there is something lacking which makes them nonsalable. Then they must either be rewritten or "docked" for the time being.

It does not seem to be the custom of all writers to critically read over a rejected scenario before resubmitting it, but it is at all times advisable to do this. If something is found wrong with the script at such a time, it should be "fixed up" at once, and the script sent out again. If it is beyond fixing, we think it best to put it away, temporarily or permanently, according to its redeeming features. In no case keep a script out of the fray which has any chance at all of selling. Postage is expensive, but the returns are surely worth the investment.

#### MAKING ADVICE PRACTICAL.

It will do a writer but little good to carefully follow the advice given in this department unless he can learn to apply it to his own work. On the surface, this seems to be a simple matter, but it is safe to say that eight out of every ten amateurs find difficulty in doing so.

The theoretical part of it is very nice indeed, and requires far less gray matter to absorb; but if real benefit is to be gained by a writer, he must read what we have to offer and then literally forget all about us by completely changing the advice to suit his own particular case.

By this we do not mean that wherever we say one thing another should be done. Far from it; for this would, indeed, be fatal. We do mean, though, that the writer must realize just to what degree what we say affects him, and in just what way he can better his work by following it.

## ANOTHER DANGER

On a previous occasion we warned writers not to do a single scenario and then sit down to wait until it sold before thinking of writing another one. That advice, we consider, is worth appropriating, but there is another extremity which must also be avoided.

A writer who is not sure of his footing, and who has not learned to concentrate his mind upon the subject before him, may twist this advice around so that he firmly believes the more ideas or partially developed plots he has to work upon in rotation the better his work will be.

With a few writers—we have read their accounts of their working methods—this may be all right; but with the average photo-playwright it is sure to result disastrously; for his mind will not center upon any particular plot, and all will lack that essential quality known as “punch,” which is born of the enthusiasm of the writer.

Three, four, or five scenarios, we believe, should be the limit for those who are not in the professional class; and then there should always be a distinct difference between these unfinished scripts. One must always be almost ready for scene development, another rapidly nearing completion, a third in need of redrafting—or replotting—et cetera. In this way the writer can probably concentrate to the full power of his ability on the script on which he is working during the time it is before him, but still have the plots of the other stories in the back part of his mind, ready for consideration when wanted.



## PEEVED OVER REJECTIONS?

We all get them. What? Rejections, of course. Therefore we all know how we feel when we start to read the lines we know so well: "The editor regrets that this offering is unavailable, but hopes," et cetera.

The effect of these gentle words on authors is very different indeed. Some grit their teeth and sit down to turn out a new scenario; others laugh externally and weep internally; quite a few—males—cuss mentally, if not verbally; a large army do miscellaneous things, springing from their individual temperaments; but the majority—the great majority—just get plain "peeved."

Why? If you ask them, they will ask you why they shouldn't. They thought enough of the company and its editor to submit their best script for the initial inspection, and, even though said company and editor couldn't "see" it, they should have at least written some brief little note of explanation or criticism when they returned it.

Now, while thinklets of that kind are all very nice from the amateur's point of view, he doesn't appreciate the editor's point of view, or he would at once forget all about this "letter-with-rejection" stuff. It simply cannot be done, for the man who says "yes" or "no" in regard to the acceptance of submitted scripts is far too busy to give every outsider who sends in an occasional scenario—whether it be said writer's "masterpiece" or not—his individual opinion in writing.

If you would be content and happy while in the photo-playwriting game, do not, under any circumstances, worry

over rejections, or get peeved because they simply carry the polite little note neatly printed, and somewhat less neatly folded. Just determine that every rejection slip, after its smoke has curled up the chimney and its ashes lie scattered about the fireplace, is one more pebble removed from your path to success.

#### LOVE SCENES.

"This story wouldn't have been so impossible," said an editor to us recently, "if that fool young writer hadn't given the best that was in him to making Robert W. Chambers stuff out of the love scenes and neglected honest-to-goodness action and development where it was needed."

He showed us the script, which ran thirteen pages for two reels, and pointed out six love scenes, each of which consumed at least three-quarters of a page, and one of which ran over onto the next sheet. The basic idea of the story was good, and the synopsis looked promising because it merely sketched the plot. Had the author carefully developed his plot in the scenario proper, supplying, as the editor said, honest-to-goodness action and development where it was needed, there would have been little doubt but what he would have registered a sale—though the company to whom he submitted is buying very little—this script having been particularly fitted to the kind of productions they are making. As the script stood, it was rejected.

The moral is obvious. Love scenes are very seldom more than incidents in a story of worth. They are very

charming incidents, we agree, and doubtless are as interesting to a large portion of the average audience in a motion-picture theater as any other part of a film. Write them in, and write them as humanly as possible; but don't overdo them. Unless you have some very clever business you wish to introduce, just merely state that John and Mary appear in love scene, ending in embrace. Where you have some clever business, "get it over" to the director and editor as concisely as possible. Then apply the time you would have spent working out all the frills of the scene to putting in the "honest-to-goodness action and development" that is needed to keep you from getting into the class with the writer who *almost* sold.

#### THOUGHT.

If the scenario writer who has not yet registered his first sale, though he has been working along for some time, will look into his own heart and be fair with himself in every way, we believe he will find that no one but himself is to blame for his not achieving success.

There may be many reasons for this failure, far too many to attempt to list, but the principal one is probably the lack of thought in preparing each scenario submitted. It is a common fault, and a hard one for the young scenario writer to master—the reason for this being that he cannot recognize his own weakness.

He gets an idea which appears to be a good one. He looks it over for plot possibilities. He finds what he considers a fine angle, and applies it. Then he adds

motives, a little action, some suspense, and some heart-interest stuff, and "fires it along." In time it comes back; it is sent to another studio, and meets a similar fate; and then another, with a like result. He begins to think of the possible reasons for the rejection, but seldom strikes upon the right one, for he is certain that he has given the idea the best development it could have at his hands.

The place he should look for the weak spot is in his very first step after getting an idea of merit, for in ninety out of a hundred amateurs' cases we believe this is where the trouble lies. The beginner does not like to discard his ideas when building up a plot, so, when a situation or incident pops into his head, he feels that it belongs to the story, and puts it in. Once in, he will seldom remove it.

Then, too, he often starts his idea off along a certain line of general development, without giving it proper consideration. This may result in the entire scenario being hopelessly bad, whereas, had the idea been thought over and considered from various angles, a viewpoint might have been secured which would furnish the main plot for a salable script.

To trained writers, the creating of the main elements of the plot by which they are to present their idea on the screen is a most nerve-racking process. They think and think, select and discard, build up and tear down, until in their mind they have outlined what, in their judgment, is the best possible line of development. Even this they will alter if they later discover a more likely possi-

bility, but the more thorough the forethought, the less the need there will be for changes later on.

The beginner will never lose by giving much time and thought to this part of scenario writing, for it is of extreme importance. Of course, the fact that a writer can learn to apply this to his scripts does not mean that he can sell all he writes, for very few do that, but it does mean that his chances to break through the line of rejection slips at very frequent intervals will be excellent.

#### FREE LANCES AND ADAPTATIONS.

Speaking of general conditions, there is no market at the present time for scenarios adapted from books or plays by free lances. Here and there one may be "placed" by an outside writer, but this should not lead the newcomer in the field to believe that he can do likewise, for there is a lot of work on a five—or more—reel adaptation, and to have it rejected time after time is anything but pleasant.

We cannot say that we blame amateurs for wishing to try their hand at adapting plays and novels for the screen after visiting picture theaters night after night and seeing so many of them on the screen; but it is the same with these as with serials—the game is for the older hands. Every company turning out multiple-reel feature productions based on produced plays or published books has at least one, and very often three or four, experienced writers who can give them all the material they need along the lines of working script adaptations.

The free lance must be content for the time being to



do one, two, and possibly three or four-reel original scenarios—the length depending upon each individual writer's experience and ability. Things are bound to change, and when they do—— But that is looking too far into the future!

THE MAILING DEPARTMENT.

Every now and then it is advisable for the promising scenarioist to look over his mailing department and see that it is not getting into the rut. A writer striving to turn out too much salable material is liable to overlook the importance of selling what he writes and become negligent in the matter of submitting intelligently.

This can never lead to success, for he must be on his toes all the time. From the moment he begins to create the script to the time he signs the dotted line on the release blank, he must watch every opportunity to reap financial reward for the product of his brain. He is an artist until the script is completed—then he becomes a business man, and must use businesslike methods.

The "mailing department" of every writer should consist of himself and two or three books; one for keeping track of the exact wants of all the companies at all times; another for keeping track of where each script has been submitted, et cetera; and a third, which is really not necessary to a beginner, to keep track of expenditures in handling the scripts. We consider it highly important that a writer should always keep his "mailing department" up to scratch, for it corresponds largely to the advertising department of a newspaper—the end that

brings in the money, though it cannot do so without the editorial department's product—the news.

DO YOU KNOW?

Do you know that no matter how many years you would work on a plot, it would never be anywhere near complete?

This may sound like a needless statement to some, but we believe that there are many amateurs in the game to-day who firmly believe that there is a certain mental rule which they must acquire somewhere which will enable them to mechanically turn out plots which are measured and tied up in neat packages of the same dimensions, and which are complete and unchangeable in every detail.

Writers laboring under this impression are handicapped. They may have a scenario which is perfectly balanced dramatically and artistically, and still feel that it is not worthy of submission because they have not yet acquired the "something" which will enable them to write salable scripts.

This feeling in writers certainly is not as common as the one which prompts them to believe that all they write will sell, despite the shortage of brain work in some of it, but it is equally as fatal to success, and should be overcome.

It is very true that an amateur is more likely to underdevelop the idea which he gets because of the lack of experience, but there is no reason why he should not carefully study the screen and apply his studies to his own script, thereby getting a fair idea of how well he has

treated his subject. As a writer gains experience, he is able to judge just how well he has done his own work with a little more accuracy, and it is because of this, doubtless, that the beginner feels he is out in the cold.

The wise writer, no matter how long he has been in the game, pays no attention to such "feelings" but goes right ahead and does his work to the very best of his ability, thinking out, in his own way, every difficulty which arises, and injecting his own personality into every typewriter line. That is really the only way a beginner can hope to cease being a beginner, and even then there is much between him and success—the reward is worth the effort.

#### SAVING POSTAGE.

We wonder how many of our readers are interested in the postage-expense-saving question?

Here is one way to cut it down: When your present batch of scripts are returned—one by one, of course—take each and look it over carefully. Study it and compare it to all the screened pictures you have seen lately.

Is it worthy of consideration? Is it fresh and strong enough to make an editor select it as acceptable from among a hundred others?

If you can truthfully answer "yes" to those two questions, send the script along on its travels, and it may bring back a check. If you believe in your heart that your answer to either of them should be "no," however, set the script aside for a time and do not waste postage sending it out. Do not destroy the script, for you may

take it up in a week or so, and, by revamping and rewriting it, make it into a scenario which would tempt any editor or director.

#### THE COMEDY WRITER.

Do not think that you have to be an undertaker to write comedy, if you are one of the class who believe only serious people can write nonserious stuff. Or do not think that one has to be a village cut-up to attain the same position, as seems to be the popular belief among another class.

The man who writes comedy scripts for the screen is liable to be of almost any size or disposition. Among our personal friends are two scribes who sell almost all the comedy scripts they write, but of whom have still to register their first sale of a dramatic script. Their make-up is entirely different. One cares nothing at all for other people's society and likes to do serious things in his own way at his own pleasure; while the other fellow is never in greater delight than when surrounded by a party of his friends and telling funny stories. This is but one of the things in which they differ; there are dozens of others.

It all goes to show that humor is not something which is restricted to a certain type of persons, but which is lying dormant in all intelligent humans, and is merely more highly developed in some than in others. Perhaps you are a comedy writer and do not know it. We would advise all those who have considered comedy beyond their power to give themselves a thorough trial at writ-

ing it, and, if the work shows any promise at all, to try to develop the latent talent.

SERMONS AND IDEAS.

There is a great difference between photo plays which carry ideas and those which attempt to preach a sermon, but the beginner who attempts to write one of the former class is in great danger of unintentionally turning out one of the latter variety.

It is best for all but thoroughly experienced writers to avoid this class, but where an amateur wishes to try his hand, he should remember that the more skillfully he can hide the actual text of the idea he wishes to carry, the stronger the effect will be and the "bigger" the play will go.

AN EDITORIAL WEEK.

Some week put your pencil and pad—or, to be modern, typewriter—away and give yourself a little training in the editorial line. Just forget that you are a writer, and pretend that you are a "hard-hearted" editor, frowning upon all that comes before you, and rejoicing whenever you find anything of real worth.

Where will you find scripts to edit? That is where the benefit comes in. Just bring out your "dead" scripts from the storage vault and dust them off. Then secure one of the magazines devoted to motion pictures which carries the synopses of the various manufacturers. When these are at your elbow, assume a dignified editorial position and begin work.

First read through a few of the synopses of films which



have been released in the magazine, and then read one of your own synopses. Analyze them, and decide just why the "live" ones were accepted and yours was rejected. Maybe yours will be the best, in your honest opinion. That is possible, and if you find this to be the case, learn just why it is better, and then fix up the points that are weak and send it out again.

Follow this course all the way through your rejected scripts—if you have more than one—and you will probably learn many things which never occurred to you before. You need not consider the time wasted, even if you cannot find anything worth while in your "dead" scripts, for, remember, you have received your first editorial training, which is worth something, and may prove beneficial in the long run if repeated often enough. There will always be a demand for editors as well as for writers, you know, and it is well to be prepared.

#### HELPFUL TO DIRECTORS.

While we admit that many directors consider suggestions from the scenario writer a nuisance, we feel we are right in saying that the majority of *real* producers welcome suggestions from the man who has created the story. In the cast of characters, it seems to us that a line or two of condensed characterization is permissible. This does not mean physical description of a character, by any means, for almost any actor is liable to be cast for the rôle if the scenario sells to a big company.

We do think, however, that by giving some important physiological feeling of a character, or even telling what

his purpose in the play is, proves very helpful, not only to the director but also to the player who portrays the rôle. This would necessarily be confined to the two or three leading rôles, and, as we said before, must be considered. If the writer feels he has drawn the character perfectly in the script proper, it is also unnecessary, though we think it a good plan to use it, anyway.

The writer may also help the director to "get" the meaning of the scenes. If a certain action by a player would spoil an effect the author is striving at, we think great care should be taken to explain, in brackets, within the particular scene, just what the author's purpose is, and why the specified action should not be allowed to creep in. A certain arrangement of the scenes to gain a desired effect is also worthy of a special explanatory note, telling the author's purpose, as are a hundred other things which will bob up here and there throughout a scenario.

Do not use these "extra notes" unless you feel they are needed; but never hesitate to put them in wherever they seem necessary, for if you can help an earnest director to understand a script by this means he will be sure to remember you as a writer whose scripts he likes to work from.

#### COMEDY AND ITS DIVISIONS.

We can only distinguish two classes of comedy on the screen at the present time—straight and farce. Both burlesque and travesty have become merely essential elements to the farce, while the straight comedy is going

along its own little way with few producers paying much attention to it.

It is of value for writers to know how to turn out all styles of plays, and, though many cannot enjoy farces at all, we would advise that they be studied. If an author can rise above fellow writers who can give the motion-picture public, via the editors, something which is entirely different and genuinely funny, he will be very welcome right now. There also seems to be room for men or women who can write straight comedy which will draw real laughs. We think a change in the methods of screen laugh getting is soon due.

#### BEATING THE CENSORS.

While we at all times advocate the writing of scripts which, when they are made into films, will not offend those royal monarchs, the censors, we know that there are some elements needed now and then to make a film "go over."

These elements need not be used in every script which a writer turns out; in fact, they should be used in as few as possible; but where they are used, we think the writer should know just how to "get it by" the censors.

A long time ago, direct killing was placed under ban, and writers and directors began to employ the cut-back. This is the system which can now be used effectively to "cover up" any objectionable act. Not only will the film get by without being cut by the censors, but it will also be more artistic minus the actual showing of a questionable act.

We will not attempt to name any of the acts to which we allude, for the list would be a long one; but we think every writer knows just what he would be proud to tell his own family he created, and what he would not like to have them see. By judging things in this way, he can best decide for himself just what should be "hidden" by the cut-back.

#### HOW TO CELEBRATE.

We think we are safe in saying that practically all the free-lance scenario writers have some way or other of celebrating their success when they register a sale. From personal experience we know that this celebration thing is liable to get the best of one, and as a result the size of the check received is reduced considerably before it reaches the bank.

Here is where the danger of too much celebration lies. When the letter accepting the script arrives, the author feels joyful. Result—first celebration. When the check arrives, the author again feels joyful. Second celebration. When the play is released, and the author goes to see it with his friends, he feels joyful for the third time. Third celebration.

We are not mentioning any certain means of celebrating, but merely stating that a celebration takes place, and right here we wish to state that celebrations of any kind cost money. The moral is that every script which "lands" should be celebrated in some small way once, and the attention of the author should then be riveted on making another sale. The sooner a beginner or a progressing

author realizes that scenario writing is a commercial proposition, the sooner he will advance.

While this talk is meant particularly for our brother writers, it also applies to sister scenarioists, though the latter, as a rule, are more thoughtful about the disposition made of money earned with their typewriters and brains.

When studying the screen, be sure to get both the good and bad points of a plot. If you only get one or the other, your work is half done.

#### FIVE-REEL FARCES.

Whatever you do, don't try to write a five-reel farce comedy if you are a beginner, or unless you are a master of the *art* of writing this style of comedy.

We saw a beginner's effort along this line the other day, and it almost made us weep. He had taken "Way Down East" and "East Lynne" and tried to combine and burlesque them. The plot was a nightmare, and the scene action far worse. We told him we were going to write this after we had convinced him how wrong he was, and he gave us permission to make it as strong as we wished, if it would help others.

To begin with, he didn't have footage enough for one reel, there being one hundred and thirty-nine scenes, about fifty of which an experienced comedy director would "kill" on the first reading, and about fifty more of which would be found impractical for comedy purposes when production was actually begun. Then there was little real humor in the entire proposition. It was clearly



strained from start to finish. He had started out determined to burlesque these two well-known plays, and had stuck to that idea through thick and thin. Worse than that, he had been unable to put in little bits of funny by-play even where opportunity offered itself, for he was laboring under the impression that the main idea would be funny enough in itself—which is at all times wrong.

We didn't try to find all the faults in the script, but he tore it up before we left him, and thanked us for the tip. We hope that readers who have been contemplating a plunge into the "feature-farce" field will reconsider, for it is really almost impossible. There are only about three markets, at the most, and we know positively that one of these companies has a director who has made a six-reel farce without any semblance of a scenario whatever. He is a born comedian, and no matter what idea comes within range of his mind he can present it in such a manner that it will draw a laugh. As far as the plot of the six-reeler mentioned goes—it wasn't. It was a laugh getter, and that was all it was meant to be.

#### SYNOPSIS.

"Shall I write one synopsis to cover the entire story of a multiple-reel scenario, or shall I write a separate synopsis for each reel?"

That seems to be one of the many "eternal questions" which bother the amateur photo-playwright. Like other questions of its kind, this is easily disposed of by the older writer, but is not such a simple matter for the beginner to answer.

Let us consider the thing from a "horse-sense" point of view.

After you have written your scenario, you know that you must write a synopsis to tell the editor briefly what its plot is about. If the scenario is for a one-reel subject only, there can be no doubt in your mind but that it will run right through to the finish. Now, why should two, three, or more reels cause a writer to pause and wonder "how it's done"? The idea is just the same in both cases. You wish to briefly outline your story for the benefit of the reader or editor who has to read it along with hundreds of other scripts. The answer is: "Write your synopsis straight through, regardless of reels."

While some editors may prefer to have a division made, we think the majority simply want an outline of the story in as concise form as possible, and told without a break. It saves space, and does away with something which is not really essential. For the free lance it is better, therefore, to make no division in the synopsis of a scenario written for the general market.

#### LEADERS.

Lubin recently inaugurated a new way of "getting over" a statement without using a leader, the style used being to insert the words spoken by a character in the scene itself by means of double exposure. This is indeed an enterprising move, but we doubt if another company would like to do the same thing, especially since it is not their invention. Therefore, the amateur who, after seeing one of these pictures, hurried home and rewrote :

script he had on hand so that all leaders appeared in this way, will doubtless find some trouble in finding a market for his product.

It is not because it is not a good scheme, or because no company but Lubin are at liberty to use leaders in this way that it would be rejected, but because it has not been accepted as standard technique, and is rather expensive to handle. What is wanted from the outside writer is new ideas for plots. The writers and directors in the studios are in better position to supply new ideas on technique, for they know the exact policy of their company and also just what material is available.

It is well for the person not in close touch with some single company for which he writes most of his scenarios to use accepted technique, except in special cases where nothing else seems available. Then it is permissible to wonder off the main path, but his script is subject to change at the hands of the man who produces it. We think the best thing for a beginner to do is to throw open the throttle when searching for new plot ideas and to apply the brakes when it comes to "playing horse" with technique.

#### TRAINING.

Of course we all know that training is necessary, no matter what we try to do, and that the more pretentious our task is, the harder we will have to work to prepare ourselves to equal it.

Now, while many writers know this, not all of them fully appreciate its application to themselves. A scenario

writer is producing images from his mind which are intended to amuse and educate the entire world. Some may not consider this a "life-size" job, but we do. Granting that you get our point of view, let's consider the man who is doing this writing. Has he equipped himself, by vigorous mental training, with enough knowledge to permit him to face the work with an even chance of making good?

We fear that many of those who are trying to sell scripts to-day are not able to say that they are equal to the task of writing "stuff" that they would be proud to tell the world was theirs. On the surface they may believe that it is good, but a writer should not live entirely on the surface for the simple reason that he is a writer, and that writers are supposed to analyze.

What the majority of those who are not selling at the present time need is training. Long, hard hours of study and work—done with enthusiasm and intelligence—is what will bring any writer with ability through the masses, and place him on the pinnacle he wishes to reach.

There is no set rule by which a writer may train. Scenarios are created by the writer, and he must therefore have initiative to hit out along untrodden paths if he wishes to turn out something that is "different." It is the same with his training. He must create his own course, and he must see that he works out his plans for this course, and then fills them to perfection. It is an individual affair with each writer, and, while much help may be gained from outside suggestions, the actual value

of the training—from the knowledge-absorbing point of view—depends on the writer's individual effort.

Are you, scenario writers, big enough to look past the surface appearance of your work, and see its weak and strong points? Are you big enough to map out a course of training for yourself, whereby your weak points may be brought up to the standard of the rest of your work, and by which the worth of your output may materially increase with each production of your brain? It is up to you, for we—or any one else—can merely give you suggestions here and there, which, when applied to your own work, will awaken new thought in your mind and help you in your training.

#### UNIQUE ENDINGS.

For a long time the progressive critics and writers on motion-picture subjects have advocated unusual endings, and we firmly believe that the majority of writers, amateur and professional, agree with this movement.

The "nigger in the woodpile," however, is the application of this theory, for it seems to be a habit with scenario writers to forget all about it when they reach the last few scenes of each script they turn out, and go right through to the ending which every one was expecting.

In the amateur's case, this is easily explained, for he is so busy visualizing his action into scenes that he forgets all about the ending. In the case of the professional, however, it is different. He should see that every play's ending is given more than a little consideration, and, while



it is impossible to make each and every one startling, it is easy comparatively to make them "different."

We use the words amateur and professional in this case in a broad sense, including those who are not sure of their footing in the first class, and those who understand the work in the last. The "amateur" should seek to learn just what would make his ending "different," while the "professional" should make it his duty to give every scenario he turns out a little twist at the end.

It may seem like a lot of wasted space to point out this single weakness, but it is a fact that an audience can "sense" the end of an average film three or four scenes before its arrival, because they have seen the same finish many times before. This surely is significant, for in time it will have its effect on the entertainment value of motion pictures.

#### THE FUNERAL MARCH, PLEASE.

Those who are wont to go back into the days gone by and dig up material from some ancient play which they believe every one has forgotten, were handed a bit of worth-while advice by William Lord Wright recently. He selects the mortgage plot—that famous stand-by of writers dead and gone—as the special point of his attack, but that there is a deeper meaning to it can easily be seen by those who "look behind the type."

Here's what he says:

"That good old stand-by of the spoken drama of the thrills classification—namely, the mortgage and the shy-ster lawyer—are barred from picture-play plots pur-

chased by leading film companies. The mortgage plot was thought to have died a natural death in melodrama when the 'papers' were worked overtime by the villain. Not so, Hortense, not so! With the advent of the motion-picture play, all the timeworn tricks of the spoken drama were lugged to the animated screen and presented to the people as 'new stuff.' There was invariably the unjust travesty on the legal profession, the 'shyster' lawyer, who held the mortgage on the old home farm, and who threatened to foreclose the same unless the farmer's beautiful daughter, in love with the honest young husbandman on the adjoining 'forty,' was given to the said lawyer in marriage. The 'shyster' lawyer, so-called, always appeared in an office in which there was a small safe in one corner, and he always visited the safe, produced the papers, and then rubbed his hands in fiendish satisfaction as he gloated over the documents. Certainly he met with a timely punishment, but in so doing the members of the legal profession were frequently presented in an unfavorable light. The script editors are refusing to buy mortgage plots any more, and it is high time. So mote it be!"

#### STOLEN-SCRIPT TROUBLE.

A correspondent in Nashville, Tennessee, wrote us recently and complained that he had submitted a script to a "certain individual" of a well-known concern, and that the script had never been returned. A production which almost exactly followed the scenario he wrote has been put out by this company, but letters to the "certain

individual" asking for an explanation bring no reply. He wondered if he could resubmit the script to another company, providing he secured witnesses' signatures to prove it was his, and if the first company could take any legal steps in case the play was again produced. In his letter was also the question: "Is there any way that an author can protect fraud concerns from taking and producing his submitted scenarios?"

The writer didn't tell us the name of the company, or even hint at the identity of the "certain individual," but it makes little difference, for we will consider the principle of the thing only. To begin with, we doubt if it was one of the established companies, for the last question he asks makes us believe that it was a "wildcat" concern, with a name gained through "stock-sale" advertising.

Granting that it was one of the big companies, however, and that the play was produced from his script, we will work it out for the benefit of the writer and others who may have similar troubles.

The weak spot, as all those who have been in the game for any length of time easily realize, was the fact that the writer submitted the script to a "certain individual" rather than to the scenario department of the company. We are in position to state that had he submitted in the correct way to any of the established companies the letter would never have been written, for there would have been no need for it. Editors and readers are responsible, and are carefully chosen for their position by

the various companies. We must admit that once in a while a black sheep creeps into the fold, but the few who have tried stealing the work they were supposed to pass judgment on met with anything but an enjoyable fate.

In submitting to the "certain individual," whom he probably knew or felt he "stood in" with, the writer took the future of his script in his own hands, for the company was in no way obligated. It was the same as though the writer met an acquaintance on the street and gave him the script to sell. He wouldn't be able to do much to a company if the stranger sold the script as his own and pocketed the money, so why should he even mention the company in the present case?

If the matter was brought to the film firm's attention through the proper channel, the officials would undoubtedly do all they could to punish the "certain individual," for he doubtless claimed it to be his own work when he sold it to them. As far as reselling the scenario goes, though, we fear the writer is trotting along the wrong path. The company which has already made the subject certainly could make a fuss if it again appeared on the screen under a different trade-mark than their own, but this is almost impossible, for the editors of the various concerns would probably "spot it" before they finished reading the synopsis. Then the writer would be the only one to lose, for the editors would believe that he was the one who was stealing another's work.

We hope that amateurs will profit by this writer's trouble. There is only one way to do a thing, and that

is the right way. That statement applies to any kind of work, but when focused on scenario submissions it means: Send in your scripts in the regular manner, addressing them to the scenario department, and not to an individual, and inclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope for its return if unavailable.

#### USING A DUMMY.

While we still see a dummy dropped from a cliff, or made do some equally "thrilling" things in films occasionally, it seems safe to say that the day of the "substitute" is fast nearing its close. Writers who have said that the public are "picture wise" have spoken the truth, for a motion-picture audience is no longer shocked by the realism of a figure—apparently of a player—being dashed to death. The time has passed, so the wise playwright now watches himself closely and sees that the "dummies" he calls for in his scripts are few and far between.

#### DIRECTORS AND REJECTIONS.

Why does a director reject a script after the scenario editor of his company has accepted it?

That is the question which has been fired at us by one of our correspondents, and one which we have often heard amateurs ask when they received a rejection slip from a company with a comment by a director attached.

Certain companies will not allow their directors to select their own material, but many another will; and it is with the latter that the answer must deal. In such companies, the scenario editor is told to see that each



director is given enough good material to put on so many scripts per month, and the editor proceeds to turn over all passable scripts to the directors whose requirements they seem to fit. When the script reaches the director, that worthy has many things to take into consideration. It must fit his company, give a good part to his star, be appropriate, not cost too much, and be producible. There are many other little things that would affect the acceptance or rejection of a script in the director's hands also, such as a production in the course of making where similar props could be used, et cetera.

In cases where the scenario editor's O. K. merely indicates that the plot of the story is acceptable, the matter of acceptance or rejection is up to the director to whom the scenario is handed. We cannot say that we exactly like the "director-final system," but we know that some companies have worked it out successfully, the directors being the final judges of all submitted material that showed promise.

#### THE QUESTION OF REALISM.

In the early pages of this book we cautioned script writers not to overdo in injecting realism into their scripts.

The point of our previous writing on the subject was: "eliminate the gruesome details which, while they are true to life in every respect, are not entertaining." A friend of the writer recently said that he had seen two films by a well-known company in one of which a frail woman easily overcomes a band of Japs in a struggle, while it

takes a husky man some time to down them; in the other, one man steals a letter from another's pocket without any one of a group, who are standing about, noticing him. Inspired by these two far-fetched bits of action, the friend concluded his remarks by saying: "Don't you think there ought to be enough realism to make a plot look reasonable to the average mind?"

Our answer to his question is obviously in the affirmative, and we go much further, and say that in order to meet with public approval it is absolutely necessary for a production to be logically developed. This is an entirely different issue from the one we treated, however. Realism is one thing, overrealism another. As we said before, a film which is so realistic in the little touches of human interest it contains "goes big" no matter what sort of audience views it, while a film which is given over to detail or gruesome realism generally "falls flat."

There is a happy medium which all writers must seek. If you are writing a drama of business life, you can increase its value by giving your characters natural situations and human-interest bits of byplay, and you can handicap your chances of sale by carefully working out in detail a business deal with all its cumbersome "ins and outs." While you doubtless can make the latter action fairly interesting, we doubt if it would compare at all with a picture in which the business deal was merely sketched for the benefit of your audience and the real interest focused on the actions of your characters.

Another place where overrealism frequently crops out

is in detective, police, et cetera, plays. Things which offend many, and shock very few less often, appear in this variety of plays, and, though logical and correct in every way, would be better left out, and merely suggested. Incidentally, if less realism were used in plays of this class, we would have less trouble from our well-meaning but misguided friends, the censors, for there would be little chance for them to do any "clipping."

The scenario writer should always see that the action in his script is logical before it is mailed out; he should also see that he has not mistaken realism for overrealism.

#### CUT-IN LEADERS.

A beginner in the scenario-writing game seems to take a great delight in breaking "cut-in leaders" into scenes just to show that he can do it. Perhaps there is no phase of photo-play technique which can so easily make or mar a script as this, and yet it is as loosely handled as though it were a thing of minor importance.

A script writer should make it a point to see that whenever a leader is broken into a scene it is not only absolutely necessary, but also somewhat of a help to the artistic value of the scenario. The mere fact that a cut-in momentarily halts the action within a scene counts against it, so there must be good reason for its use or it will be sure to draw a frown from the critical ones who pass judgment on the script.

Short conversation is the best form to use in a cut-in, and this can generally be worked out satisfactorily, though there are exceptions. The leader must be fitted

to the action regardless of whether it is a "quote" or a "straight," and must state, in as brief a manner as possible, the idea the author wishes to convey and which he cannot conveniently "put over" through the actions of his characters.

#### A SCENE PLOT.

A scene plot is something which may or may not be prepared by the amateur. It is a help to the director who produces the script—if it sells—and in one is really necessary, while in another it is not.

We think that all those who can come close to writing a working script should supply a scene plot. If used, it should follow the synopsis and cast, separating these from the scenario proper. Judging from our beginner friends' efforts, many of them are a little bit at sea as to what a scene plot is, so we will analyze it.

The object of a scene plot is to tell the director just where the action takes place. It should be divided into interior and exterior classes, the former being called sets and the latter locations. If you have four scenes in a parlor, three in a kitchen, and two in the back yard, you would write your scene plot thus:

Interior—Sets, 2; Scenes, 7.

Parlor—1, 4, 7, 9.

Kitchen—2, 5, 8.

Exterior—Locations, 1; Scenes, 2.

Back Yard—3, 6.

The numbers tell the director just what scenes are laid

in the particular set or location, so that they may all be filmed at the same time, while the set is up in the studio, or while the company is on the location. If the writer's script undergoes very many changes in the scene action, the scene plot is worthless, of course, but we think it a good plan to put it in, anyway. Each writer should be able to tell himself honestly whether or not his work is good enough to be put on with but few changes, and if he decides it is, the scene plot is appropriate.

#### WRITER'S INSTINCT.

The person with latent talent does things by instinct which another person would spend months learning.

That may seem like a pretty broad statement, but it is true, nevertheless, for without that queer inborn something that seems to ever guide those who are destined to make their living with their pen—or typewriter—much tedious labor must be gone through to learn even the fundamentals.

Of course, there are no writers born whose work will prove acceptable as soon as they turn their hand to it, but they will reach the selling point much sooner than one whose brain does not seem to absorb things pertaining to literature. They, like all others, must gain experience, for the more of this they get the better they are. The point we are making is that they have the jump on other writers from the start, and with hard and earnest work are sure to succeed.

We firmly believe that there are many beginners—



perhaps working on their first script—who are convinced that they belong to this class, and we do not doubt but that many of them do. As has been our habit, though, we wish to warn those who are inclined to place too much confidence in themselves not to think they are in this or another class unless they truly feel they are, for they are doing themselves a great harm unless they are self-honest.

IDEA—PLOT GERM—HUNCH.

The first inkling you get for your scenario, the flash which comes to your brain one moment and may be gone the next, but which, if it is seized upon and developed, will result in a full-sized plot, is your idea—known to many as plot germ or hunch.

This idea may be compared to the seed of a plant. It must be handled carefully, and treated in a certain way if you would have it grow into a salable photo play. And it is in treating the germ that most amateurs fall down.

There are many angles to be considered after an idea has been captured, and the wise writer gives them all a chance. Where a certain line of development would probably result in an indifferent script, another would doubtless lead to a salable plot. Much forethought must be exercised by the writer at this stage of the game.

Ideas are not common—that is, good ones—so it is well to keep all the exceptional hunches that come one's way on file, and use them to the best possible advantage. There are times when a writer is sure to run "dry," and at such times these filed ideas will indeed be welcome.

DIALOGUE IN SCENES.

It is a much-mooted question as to whether a scenario writer should write any dialogue at all into his script, except that which appears in the leaders, as a director will probably give his players different words to say, anyway, during the filming of the action.

Giving the words of one character's speech and the reply made by another takes up considerable space in a written scene, and if dialogue is used in the majority of scenes the size of the script will become prohibitive. We are of the opinion that it is better to simply explain what your character says, and give a little "business" to convey the meaning to the audience in actions, than to write in his words. Where a leader is required at the point where the character speaks, it is all right to cut one in in dialogue form.

We know many directors who take each scene they put on, and give each of their characters speaking parts from the time they enter till they exit from the camera range, and we also know that to offer dialogue to these directors would be useless, as each uses the scenario he is working from merely to guide him with the action, and then treats each scene as though he were putting on an act on the speaking stage.

Then, too, there is the danger of the amateur getting into the habit of thinking that he can "get over" things through dialogue which would not register at all on the screen. It takes a skilled mind to tell just how much of what a player says before the camera will be grasped

by the audience. If the situation has been "pointed up to" carefully, the audience senses just about what the actor or actress is saying; if not—well, you have all seen some player stand before a camera and talk for several seconds without giving you any idea of what he was saying, and you know how entertaining it is. Therefore our advice to the amateur is: Don't use dialogue in scenes at all. And to the more advanced writers: Use it sparingly and intelligently.

#### BIG SCENES.

Another folly of the beginner is the use of "big scenes" in scenarios which have not plot enough to justify a large expenditure, even if they were purchased by some company. By big scenes we mean those on which a large amount of money is spent, even though the effect is not very startling. We quite readily grant the point that more than once a scene costing considerable has supplied the punch which saved the play, but—we always have a "but" up our sleeve—should the amateur jump at the conclusion that because he has written a fairly passable play he can turn it into a masterpiece by calling for a scene that will cost a few thousands in cold cash?

For thoughtful writers this spasm is unnecessary, but there are many who do not qualify for this class; we know, because we have just finished reading several hopeless scripts which invariably called for "big" scenes. Beginners must realize that the men who produce motion pictures do so to make money, and that they will not invest

a great deal of money in anything unless the expenditure brings back additional profit. The profit occasionally may come indirectly—as through advertisement, for example—but if you study films closely you will see that it comes in every case.

It is, therefore, up to the photo-playwright to be more than ordinarily sure that there will be big returns from the finished production if his script calls for a “big” scene, and even then the chances of selling are less than if he write a straight-from-the-shoulder, simple script with a kick behind it, for editors don’t like to “take a chance” with “big”-scene scripts.

#### SPECTACULAR FEATURES.

In these days, when several of the companies do not seem to mind blowing up anything from a village to a yacht, it is difficult for the writer who has a splendid idea which requires the sinking of a battleship or two to restrain himself.

Of course, he does not know that the company probably selected the book or play adaptation in which a big effect could be gained for that reason alone, as they figured that with the advertising value of the work and the author’s name and the spectacular effect the film would go big.

There is practically no market right now for a spectacular feature written by an unknown free lance, so it is wasting one’s time to carefully lay out plans for a big feature of this kind, as it will probably go unsold.

## A GREAT ESSENTIAL.

Simplicity can safely be said to be the keynote of successful scenario writing, for it applies to all branches of the work.

A simple plot, which has strength, is the one which always meets with editorial favor, a simple technique—minus a lot of terms which have grown to be a joke in many studios—attracts attention, a simple manner of wording the leaders of the script, but one which commands attention, and, above all, the simplicity of the finished script as it lies in the editor's hands, thus making it easy for him to read it from the first word of the synopsis to the last word in the last scene without having to ponder over some new angle in construction—which is generally illogical—that the budding writer is trying to spring.

One common fault with amateurs is that they feel the more complicated they can make their scenarios—from plot to finished script—the more chance they have for sale. If we never did anything else, we wish to correct this impression. Of course, there is no place on the screen for the painfully obvious picture play, but there is no need for writing this class, for it is entirely different from the simple play. The latter is one which contains strength in every scene, and whose dénouement may not be disclosed until two or three scenes from the finish—possibly not till the last scene—but throughout the development of which the audience is not burdened by unnecessary complications, many characters “running



around loose," intentional digressions from the main theme, et cetera, et cetera. It depends upon the strength of its situations and incidents, which are presented in a straight-from-the-shoulder manner, to "get it over." We are sure you all must have seen the two classes at some time or other, and, if you enjoyed the one whose keynote was simplicity better than the complicated one, why not write the former? There are many others—among whom are editors—who enjoyed the simple one, too, so you will not be playing a single-handed game.

#### AVOIDING THE CONVENTIONAL.

The art of avoiding the selection of conventional material comes only with experience, as a rule, though we have known many to write their scripts "different" from the very start. It is the hardest thing an amateur is up against, and one to which the majority give little more than passing attention.

To write scripts that can justly be termed "original," the writer must give each a twist that makes it distinctive. We say without hesitation that for an amateur to pick a plot that has been done but a few times before during the first six months' experience is phenomenal. It has been done, but by very few writers, and then, we believe, by accident.

The beginner naturally does over what he has already seen on the screen, and when this arrives at the editorial desk it is regarded as "old stuff"; therefore the countless rejections which face the amateur. As time passes, however, the writer realizes that it is something new that is

wanted, and sets out to supply this demand, avoiding all the material that he formerly considered necessary to "land" a scenario.

It is upon how soon the amateur wakes to this fact that the length of his nonselling period depends. How many of our writer-readers are prepared to wake up at once and get aboard the Pullman *Success*?

#### THE GRIP.

We are not going to write about la grippe, which follows a rainy day on which you get your feet wet, but rather about a photo play as you see it on the screen and the grip it secures on your feelings, and—incidentally—why it gets said grip.

You have all gone to the picture theater and sat through a reel or two of film—sometimes more—which bored you. You have sat through other films that, while they did not get on your nerves, certainly did not entertain you; and, again, you have watched with never-ceasing interest the unfolding of a picture which figuratively "kept you on your toes" throughout.

Why is it that they affected you so differently? Did you ever ponder over this when you returned from a theater?

Let's take the first class, and suppose we have just seen a two-reel drama. We lost interest in it during the first three or four hundred feet, and from that point on we paid so little attention to the screen that we didn't even know what it was all about when we finished. The

photography might have been good, the settings of more than ordinary beauty, the plot apparently well rounded out, the players doing good work, and everything on the surface going to make it look like any other successful film production. Yet it did not grip us.

When you next find such a play, friend scenarioists, think it over. The two-reeler we are considering appears to have 'most everything that is needed. Ah, but has it? The experienced screen man will almost instinctively put his finger on the weak spot when he learns that the picture lacks the necessary grip. It is the want of a convincing scenario. You will all undoubtedly turn back to the last paragraph to read that we said "the plot apparently well rounded out," so we repeat the statement to save you labor. That is just the trouble—it is a plot and nothing more. It was "ground out by the yard," and lacks that quality which springs only from the heart—the grip.

Its possibilities have not been studied by the writer, and the director has made very few changes in the script. It presents a story with a plot on one or two or more reels—as the case may be—nothing more. The picture which did not bore you, but which far from entertained you, received a little more truly artistic treatment some place along the line, but was marred by lack of the same care at some other point. The author may have done his work well, but the director may have reconstructed the scenario, or it might have been the writer who loafed and the director who did good work. The

result, regardless of where the fault lay, was an indifferent picture—one which lacked the grip.

The third picture was produced by true artists, whose hearts were in their work from the time the scenario was created to the time it reached the screen. But the real grip came from the scenario. It presents a "real" story in the best possible manner, and those who interpreted it had but to do their work well in order to give it the strength necessary to control the feelings of any audience.

We didn't write this to take any credit from those who assist in making a scenario into a finished film, for we have already stated ourselves on the relative importance of each division of the creators of motion-picture plays, but rather to make each scenario writer realize that he must have his heart in his work while he is doing it, and that if he does not he will lose, even though he does sell a script or two, and they reach the screen. We cannot deny that occasionally acting, photography, et cetera, will be so wonderful that it will supply the grip which an indifferent story lacked, for we have seen it done, but this is only occasionally, and an experienced eye sees through the sugar coating even then.

#### PERSEVERANCE.

Two years ago we met a young fellow who was struggling for a foothold in the fiction world. He received so many rejections every day that it ate quite a hole in his earnings—in another field—to send them out again. He was discouraged. We suggested that he quit writing fiction and try scenarios. He did, and went about it in a

businesslike manner. He learned the game from the ground up, and submitted only his best work. But his scripts were always returned. Last year we met him, after having been absent from his city for several months. He had been having a siege of rejections in the scenario line that more than equaled his previous failures in the fiction work. He was more discouraged than ever.

The two of us thrashed the matter out, and we finally persuaded him to stick to the game, and also to go back at fiction. He dropped in to see us recently and showed us three letters of acceptance he had received that week. One was from a prominent magazine, and the other two from film companies. He told us that he had established three fiction markets, and that two of the leading film companies—located in the East—were buying on the average of one every three weeks from him, and had been for several months past. He made us promise not to print his name, but consented to our using the story, so we have put it into type form in hope that the many amateurs who are in the same position he formerly occupied will be of stout heart and weather the storm so that they may enjoy the fruits of victory.

There is one quality that can never be lacking in a writer's make-up if he hopes to achieve success, and if he has not that quality born in him he must at once acquire it—perseverance.

#### SKILL IN DEVELOPMENT.

When a young man and a young woman character walk on the screen during a picture play, what is it that



tells us whether they are brother and sister, sweethearts, or merely friends? We know you'll all answer at once that it is the way they act, but when you walk on your characters into your own scripts, do you see to it that they act in such a manner that their relationship is easily established?

This is one point where the skill of the photo-playwright in developing his scene action is brought to the fore. By a single little incident he must at once let his audience know just what relationship the characters bear to each other. An amateur is sure to slight this point unless he is a close student of the screen and of his own scripts. Because the characters are so well known to him, he feels that others will also know them because of the general line of things they do in the course of the play. This is a fatal mistake, for those who read the script will also be bewildered and will lose interest in it.

This is liable to happen especially in the early part, when the characters are being introduced; but the same general principle—that of carefully selecting all “business” used—applies to the character development and the rounding out of the action in the later scenes. The more careful an amateur is of these points, the sooner he will become a professional, because when he does succeed in “landing” a script the director who produces it will remember him.

#### THE TYPEWRITING QUESTION.

In the early days of all writers who start from the bottom and without capital, there is one question to be

solved which is of no little importance. It is: "How can I get my scripts typewritten?"

Many are in a position to buy a machine, and many more are not. Some know how to operate one, but the vast majority are lost when they sit down and look upon the keyboard, with its three dozen odd ivories. In every case, except where the beginner has owned and operated a machine for some time, there exists a handicap of some kind in this regard.

It is hard to offer a general remedy, because of the many varied conditions in which scenario writers are forced to work when they begin their careers. For those who feel they are able to afford it, getting a machine on the monthly-payment basis certainly is desirable, or buying a machine outright, if you can get one at greatly reduced prices, is even better.

Then there are many who do not feel they wish to invest so much money, or tie themselves up to pay a certain amount every month. These we would advise to enlist the aid of some friend who holds a stenographic position in an office and get him or her to type off the script during the noon hour. A gift of some kind may serve to pay off the obligation, or a regular rate of dollars and cents may be arranged. Of course, there are always public stenographers and typing bureaus if the writer wishes to use them, but their rates are rather high for a beginner who has not yet begun to realize financially on the products of his brain.

We have given this matter quite a little space, because

the many beginners have complained of the handicap of getting their scripts typed. We advise each writer to study the matter carefully before plunging into it, and see in what way he can arrange to have his stories turned into neatly typed manuscripts at the least cost possible, until he owns and is able to operate a typewriter of his own.

#### KNOWING LIFE.

Perhaps nothing is so apt to discourage the amateur author as the feeling that he cannot write good scripts because he does not know life. Should he shake off the cloak which covers him and keeps him convinced that he must live before he can write, he would undoubtedly see a great light. There is no one capable of using his brains even to the slightest degree that cannot know life, regardless of his environment; though, of course, the more developed the intellect the keener the knowledge.

A scenario writer who has been in the game for several years, and who was one of the first to realize the possibilities of the silent drama, recently remarked to us that he studied the people around him and watched closely the things that were daily occurrences in the lives of himself and his acquaintances. That is the secret of the whole thing. You have to watch and study the things that are under your very nose. And, strange as it may seem, the things that are closest are hardest to recognize.

A man may have lived a life of adventure and may have had experiences which would be termed impossible if offered in fiction form, but he is none the better off

unless he can get the right "slant" at them and see them in a way that would interest others. A store clerk or a factory girl may daily go through the same routine and live what appears to be the dullest kind of a life, but if he or she watches and studies the objects near to the heart, more material may be developed than the adventurer could supply.

It is just a case of getting under the surface of the life you are living. Seeing romance where there seems to be nothing but a constant routine. It does not mean that you must have gone through every experience you set down. Far from that. You may never have had any experience similar to the ones you write about, but you know that such things could happen and your imagination does the rest. The thing you want impressed on your mind—and it can be impressed only by study—is a broad knowledge of life as it is lived. You must know why men and women do things that they do.

Do not think that because you know your neighbor Jones drinks a little too much now and then and is sometimes very funny when in this condition, you can write the things he does into a farce comedy. Just think the matter over and ask yourself this question: "Why does he drink to excess when he has such a beautiful wife and cute kiddies waiting for him at home every night?" Out of this question could spring the germ for a plot dealing with a man's struggle against drink. His failure to win over the vice because of his lack of self-control. The working out of how he conquered the habit would be of

absorbing interest—if the subject were a fit one; this is not.

We hope our readers understand what is meant by “knowing life” now, and that they will not for a moment let the fact that they have lived in one house and held one position all their lives keep them from going ahead and writing. Some of our greatest masters’ lives yielded nothing themselves which could be used for fiction, but their thinking over life around them brought forth masterpieces of literature.

DON’T USE THEM.

Have you ever read a story or article where an author constantly repeated one or two words? Probably you have not, because they are few and far between now, but if you have, you know how exasperating it is.

The same effect is gained by constantly using “registers,” “business of,” et cetera, in a scene—the director being the one affected, as the editor is hardened and does not allow anything to grate on his nerves. It is really most uncalled for, and the sooner amateurs learn that the simpler the language of their scripts the better off they’ll be, the sooner directors and authors of photo plays are going to draw together. We have said before that a script should be written in straight-from-the-shoulder English, and that the fewer technical terms a writer used the more popular he would be with people whose business it is to make films daily.

Technique is technique, but there is much more to writing photo plays than that, and it is far better to



inject "new stuff" into a script than to varnish its exterior with technical phrases. When tempted to say "business of" or something similar again, simply say "so and so does this or that." Dodge all other technical terms in the same way. We would be able to give a list a column long of the various names most amateur photo-playwrights believe they must memorize before they can gain success, but what's the use?

#### WORKING ON THE PLOT.

We wonder how much time the majority of our readers give to thinking out the plot of their scenario. Is it as long as the time required for writing the scenes out? The relative difference is very great in many cases, we fear, and it usually is the plot that finishes at the short end.

Some plots come easier than others, without a doubt, and often when an experienced writer is rushed he can concoct a plan for a picture apparently on the spur of the moment. It is probable in such cases, however, that he has had the idea in the back of his head for some time and has considered its possibilities of development before. In the average case, the plot must be carefully worked over for some time if it is to be new and refreshing to the editorial eye, as well as have the necessary "stuff" to get it past him. In our humble estimation, therefore, if proper care and consideration cannot be given to both plot and scene action—but every writer should always see that it can—it is best to spend more time on the former than on the latter.

## THE TRUTH.

In the editorial column of a newspaper we recently found several pointed sentences which told a little tale and which we reproduce herewith. Read them over carefully and absorb the meaning of each line:

"Give the other fellow credit for knowing something.

"You have no monopoly on the intelligence in the world.

"May not every man have opinions? Certainly. He who has not is a pretty poor stick. You have a right to yours, but it does not follow that those you have are infallible. Neither is it true that those of the other fellow, if they be at variance with yours, are necessarily wrong.

"Opinions are—or should be—based on a viewpoint.

"The other fellow may have a better foundation for his viewpoint than you have, and if he doesn't agree with you it is no indication that he is intolerable or that he possesses less gray matter.

"There are no more disagreeable people than those who are positive that they are always right. Such people are bound to be narrow, and the older they grow the more pronounced becomes this trait.

"When you cease to learn, you are going backward. When you get to the place where the other fellow is always wrong, you are standing directly in your own light. You are blocking the way of your own progress.

"Give the other fellow a little credit."

We presume some amateurs and graduate amateurs

wonder what all that has to do with scenario writing. It has just this: It points to a thing that is liable to cost a writer success—the belief that he knows it all and that nothing remains for him to learn. There is not a day but what the men at the very top of the motion-picture industry learn much that is absolutely new to them. They are men with power, but they are not know-it-alls. They always welcome sane suggestions, and very often use them. Is it logical, therefore, that a scenario writer should grow to feel that he knows all about his business?

We can warn amateurs against nothing which is more dangerous than allowing this feeling to gain possession of them. It is sure to have an almost immediate effect upon their work, and whether the effect will be good or bad is obvious. Always study. Never allow yourself to think for a moment you have reached the top, or you will surely find that you are very close to the bottom—when you wake up.

#### CHARACTERS AND ACTION.

Many scripts which are rejected because they lack action could be made acceptable if their authors would carefully study the chief characters in them. It is a common fault of amateurs to start a character in an important rôle in the story and toward the middle almost drop him out completely—and not for surprise purposes, either—only have him in the middle of things again toward the finish.

Sometimes this will not affect the action of the script,

but very often the absence of one of the chief characters will cause the story to sag in some certain part. It is best to start all the characters as early as possible in the story and keep them in the course of the action throughout, unless you remove them in order to bring them back later and spring a surprise.

It is very difficult for an audience to remember a character in a screen play unless he is firmly impressed on their minds. Therefore it is necessary to allow the principals of your set of characters to do things which attract attention almost at once and to keep on doing big things throughout the story. To have all your principals in practically all the action which transpires is a sure tonic for a "lacks-action" script.

#### PERSONALITY.

Have you a personality, and do you put it into every script you write?

If you can truthfully answer "yes" to that question, you have gone a long way up the road to success, but be sure your answer is a truthful one, for few amateurs have proven by their work that they have. A personality distinguishes one person from others. Every one has one, but the kind that counts is one which makes you vastly superior in attractiveness than those about you. It is this quality, when injected into scripts, which makes them "different" and more acceptable than others, which are "just like the rest of the bunch."

You cannot develop personality by wearing a straw

hat in winter and an overcoat in summer, or by allowing your hair to grow long. If you do those things, you are downright queer. Personality does not show on the surface. It is felt rather than seen. You may see a man pass you on the street and think that he looks just like many others about him. If you talk with him, however, he will hold your interest in a magnetic sort of way, while the other fellows could merely arrest your attention for a short time.

It is the same with the scenarios written by the men possessing this power to hold a person's interest. Their work acts as their agent, and immediately tells the editor it is different from the other material he has received, and that it must be much more carefully considered. Where there is no personality behind the scenario, it is just one of many, and, while it may be purchased, it stands very many more chances of being rejected.

#### LIGHTING AND TINTING EFFECTS.

Some wonderfully beautiful films have been made through clever handling of the lighting and tinting effects, and, as the mechanical end of motion pictures is explored more by men who have devoted their lives to this work, many more will doubtless be given to the public.

Just how much liberty a writer may have in calling for effects of this nature is a question. If he is selling to one studio regularly and knows they have an expert in this line who can secure almost any effect he may call for, he probably is at liberty to go as far as he likes,



but if he is selling to the general market he has to play safe. Certain companies can secure tinting effects which is impossible for others to get because they were originated within the studio and no one else had the formula. Some directors can manipulate lights and get results that others might try to attain for months without success.

It is well, therefore, if a writer is not selling to a company where such things are securable with little difficulty, to drop them out of his scripts. The "general market" does not favor them, and—though not probable—there is a possibility it might cost a sale, if some director noticed them and did not feel like rearranging the script to get rid of the scenes.

AN INTERESTING STATEMENT.

"I think the time will come," said Meredith Nicholson, the Indianapolis novelist, during a recent visit to the Chicago studios of the Selig Polyscope Company, where his "House of a Thousand Candles" was being made into a photo play, "when writers of fiction will first present their work to film manufacturers. The film will popularize the story and the serial rights will become a thing of the past. There is not a writer in the field to-day who is not preparing plots carefully with an eye turned toward their motion-picture possibilities. I mean by this that fiction is being written in such a form that it may be utilized readily for photo plays as well as for magazines and books."

We think most of our readers have heard of Mr. Nicholson at some time or other, for his works have been

very popular, and because he is one of the men in position to know his words carry much weight. Take the fiction of to-day and the fiction of ten or fifteen years ago, and, without considering its merit, look at the difference in its make-up. Action is the prevailing element in the present-day story, while the fine shading of characters marked the former literary works. We may be wrong, but we are fairly certain that the action is there because when the author wrote the story he had in the back of his head a little hunch that some day the work would be adapted to motion pictures, where characters do things rather than let the author do them for them.

There are exceptions, of course, but the majority of present-day stories make much better picture plays than the stories of the past. As Mr. Nicholson says, therefore, it will probably be only a short time before the picture producers are offered the works of the big writers before the publishers. This will in time lead to novelists and playwrights mastering the technique of the silent drama and writing working scenarios.

Further proof of this coming condition has been fixed in our mind by a statement made by Mr. Harry Aitken, president of the Mutual Film Corporation and a big man in motion-picture circles, to us in Chicago a few months ago. "The big writers are sure to come into motion pictures," he said, "though their coming will probably be rather slow. Just now picture plays are adapted from books and plays, but it is my firm belief that the future will see many plays and books adapted from motion-

picture productions." With both the producers of pictures and the writers of valuable fiction and drama having the same idea, therefore, it is easy to see that all that remains is for them to get together. How long this will take is a question in which finance plays a rather important part.

The amateur photo-playwright probably wonders how the coming of the "big fellows" will affect him. That seems to be obvious, for the profession of motion-picture play writing will be greatly elevated and the rewards to the writers will be much more substantial and lasting. Though the beginners will probably find it harder to "break in" when the plane has been raised, they will know that for the work they do the rewards will be so much greater. It will simply mean that the game will be played on a bigger basis all around; not that the amateurs will be ruled out to make room for the professionals. Remember, "the amateur of to-day is the professional of to-morrow."

#### "WITHOUT-TECHNIQUE" STORIES.

I have a story which is perfectly fitted for motion pictures, but I do not know how to arrange it."

How often all those who are in close touch with the field of amateurs have heard that wail! It comes from the man who has been bewildered by the "technical" side of motion-picture scenarios, and from those who do not take the trouble to spend several hours every week studying the screen.

Suppose we take a writer who had worked over a plot

for some time and had finally got it into pretty good shape. He may or may not know how good it is, but he is convinced that it will make a good scenario. He has heard much about the "mechanical" preparation of scripts for motion-picture plays, and is afraid to put his story into proper form. He will write to several successful authors he knows of, and tell his trouble, and after they have told him to study the screen he will decide that they are afraid to tell him what they have learned—though there is no reason under the canopy of heaven why they should—and send his story to the various manufacturers in the form it is.

There are some producers who read, and actually prefer, synopsis only; but these are in the minority, and, while they will consider his plot, the others will send it back. Had our friend gone to a picture show when he felt that his story was fitted to the screen, and had he gone there again and again, until he learned just how a story was told in motion pictures, he might have registered a sale to a company who bought full scripts and paid full-script prices.

The moral of the little "squib" about our imaginary writer is that all who have a story, and have not yet learned how to put it into scenario form, should study the screen. Pick the plays apart, one by one. See how one scene follows another. How the continuity is kept up, and how leaders fit into the story when they are used. In short, just how the scenario for each picture play you see on the screen was written. Some call this

visualizing, but, regardless of what it is, it certainly is one of the most helpful things an amateur can do. Granted the writer has the power to force his mind into an analytic mood, there is no reason why any one should be running around with a good story begging some one to tell him how to turn it into a scenario. Of course, a single trip to a picture show will not make a writer a professional in all branches of the work, but it will give him the insight needed to lead to study of the finer points. Of these there is no end, and no matter how long a scenarioist stays in the game, he will be able to learn something new about the work every day, if he tries.

NOT ALTOGETHER NEW.

One of our correspondents wrote in the other day that he had seen something which had never been done before. It was the sliding up of the camera from a full scene to a close-up view of two of the characters. The effect is not altogether new, as we have seen it used in the production of several companies. It is worked by placing the camera on a four-wheeled cart, and then pushing the cart slowly and evenly up to the principals, and pulling it back again when the close-up has been filmed.

It is one of those effects which can be used by some companies and not by others, and should be avoided by amateurs. If your script is sold to a company using this device, the director will use it wherever it seems appropriate to him, regardless of your instructions. It is one of the things in which he is probably given **free rein**, because he is doubtless responsible for its use.



THE ESSENTIAL PLOT.

A series of happenings, bound loosely together with what is termed a "plot" for courtesy's sake, will only hold the interest of a spectator for a very limited time, because his interest is not centered on the whole, but rather upon each individual happening while it is before him. The action of a plot, every incident of which is tightly woven together, and all of which bears upon one great event in the lives of a small set of characters, will hold the same spectator's interest for as long a period as it takes to logically work out the complications, for one event is as vitally interesting to him as another, and his curiosity has been aroused as to what the outcome of the entire story will be.

IMPOSSIBILITIES.

The complaint most editors have to make against the scripts of amateurs is their utter lack of logic. Only recently we saw an editor who was peacefully reading a script go into a spasm because one of the characters was sent to prison for twenty years because he stole a bottle of milk. This editor will probably remember the writer who sent in the script, but the memory will not be a pleasant one, and will not prove a selling asset for that writer in the future.

The cause of this unreasonable break was doubtless due to the writer's desire to get one of the characters out of the way for the twenty years. Friend writer hadn't learned that everything that is written must be made convincing in order to sell, so he simply dashed down the

first thing he thought of for which a man could be arrested, and took it for granted that a judge would "slap on" the long sentence.

Amateurs have to learn to overcome this habit, and sort of "think from the other end," in order to make their scripts logical at all points. When you have a certain end to reach in order to make your plot work out the way you wish, think over its various possibilities, and apply each of them to real life. Ask yourself: "If I were this man, or this woman, would I act in this manner?" Had the amateur of the "twenty-years-for-a-bottle-of-milk" episode placed himself in the position of the judge who tried the case, he probably would have seen how impossible it was, and would have supplied a crime with a little more lawlessness attached to it in order to have the character draw the required sentence.

Learn to "think around" your subject, and thus avoid impossibilities.

#### WAITING.

About once a week some one comes to us, or writes in, that such and such a company has held a script for three or four weeks, and wants to know whether they are copying the plot, to be used without paying for it.

We don't say much, but we tell writers having such complaints to make as being of the class who will have trouble all their lives. No reputable film company will be so small as to steal a play, so why fuss around on that score? If writers wish to take the chance of submitting to unreliable concerns, who are nothing more than "get-

rich-quick" schemes with a title attached, it is his own loss; but it does not pay to take such chances, and those who are in the game for a few months know it very well.

If one of the recognized companies holds a script for a month or more, don't write in and tell them you either want the script or a check by return mail. You won't get the latter, but you will get the former—and all other submissions for some time to come, unless you write a masterpiece. The longer a good company holds a script—with one or two exceptions—the more chance you have of selling it, for the policy of most big producers is to return at once all submitted scenarios that they do not consider worthy of purchase. There are several persons who have to O. K. a play before it is finally accepted, and this takes time. Learn to be a good waiter, and you will register many sales that might have otherwise become rejections.

#### HEAVY STUFF.

"He writes a lot of piffle, but his heavy stuff certainly goes big," remarked a man well known in the motion-picture world, as we were watching the unreeling of a certain author's story on the screen. The story in question was hopeless. There was no excuse for its ever having reached the screen, and it must have been "put through" because of an urgent demand for subjects by the company which made it.

The statement, however, is significant. It is possible for any person to "land" a script occasionally which is not fully up to the standard if at other times his work is

of such merit that it stands far above that of others. Editors realize that a man cannot turn out work that is a "knock-out" every time he sits down at his machine, so they are considerate. This does not apply in any way to the amateur who has not yet proved that his work is deserving, but it does to the professional who earns his living by writing alone, and who gives a certain company the majority of his work.

Begin at the very beginning by making your heavy stuff, your real efforts, carry the very best that is in you, and write an occasional bad one once in a while just to get it out of your system, if you must. Of course, the bad one is not to be submitted, but destroyed, while all of the heavy stuff will not prove quite good enough at first to deserve submission. It has, however, enough behind it to enable you to work on it until it is worthy of editorial consideration.

We know of three or four amateurs who are working out their scenario careers along these lines, and one of them only recently sold a two-reeler. It was his sixth submission in four months, but he had written many more. Slow but sure is a trite way, but it is, and always will be, a sure one. It is the way that will make an editor smile knowingly as he O. K.'s your heavy stuff for purchase.

#### FEATURES AND FLAMS.

At a gathering of big authors recently, Rex Beach is quoted as making a speech in which he said there were two kinds of motion pictures—film features and film

flams. The statement is typical of the writer whose stories of Alaskan life are so popular, and we do not believe it needs any explanation, for it conveys its own meaning to almost any mind.

Mr. Beach, of course, was taking into consideration only multiple-reel features when he made the division, but it can also be applied to smaller subjects. A motion picture is either worth while or not worth while. True, as we have said in this department before, there are many films which can be "endured" by those who see them, but in making a general classification we feel they cannot be considered worth the time spent seeing them. The question of why there should be so many flams that they are entitled to a rank alongside the features arises, and is easily answered by producing an undeniable fact—that overproduction rules supreme in most quarters.

That was the point Mr. Beach was making in the speech, and that is the point we have tried often to impress upon our readers. "Go slow," is our advice to scenarioists. Don't think because you read that such and such a writer has turned out a large number of scripts in a few days or weeks that you can do likewise. Some day you may be able to, that is true, but don't think you can right offhand. Wait until it is necessary, and then do it, but be sure you take a rest when you finish, or the grind will have a fatal effect upon your work.

The sooner amateurs, and those who are halfway toward the top, realize the truth of the above paragraph, the sooner the general standard of photo-play writing



will be raised, and the sooner we will be able to see better pictures upon the screen, for staff writers and professional authors will have to meet the competition of the outsiders and turn out better material in order to sell.

#### ONE REASON.

We know one reason that many writers have not sold their first script, and that reason is that they are firmly convinced that they must write a "thriller" if they expect to escape rejection slips.

This is far from true, though it is a fact that most of the pictures one sees on the screen contain more or less action of this variety. It is only natural, we suppose, that a beginner should try to make his scenarios as much like those he sees on the screen as possible. The folly of doing this cannot be conveyed to him in its full strength via the printed page or by word of mouth. He must learn it for himself. At the very outset of his career, however, he should think of the logic behind the statement he reads and hears so often—that producers want something different—and try to guide his steps accordingly. If he did this, it is certain that he would not do over and over that which he sees so often on the screen. He would write something the direct opposite.

Let us look at the proposition from the editor's point of view. His company is producing "wild-action" plays because their staff writers and regular contributors are writing them. The editor has orders to get variety into

the program and naturally looks for something which is the opposite of what he can easily secure from the trained authors about him. It is easy to see why a strong dramatic script from an outsider, minus killings, accidents, thrilling escapes, et cetera, would be purchased.

We would suggest that each of our readers who are on the treadmill of rejections look over their late effort and then think over the general trend of productions they have seen within the past few months. After doing that, sit down and truthfully answer this question for yourself: "Didn't you write something that was conventional?" It's more than an even bet that the answer should be "yes" in most cases, and that the scripts you have been looking over are "thrillers."

#### KEEPING THE SECRET.

When some one tells you he—or very probably she—has a secret to tell you, aren't you just a little bit interested in learning what it is, and doesn't your interest increase if you are not told right away, especially if the secret is hinted at continually?

That is just how an audience feels toward a photo play upon the screen. When you start to write your scenario you know what it is going to be about if you are a good author. The object in developing its action, then, is to keep the final result from the audience until the proper time comes—at the climax—and to stimulate the interest in the secret throughout by giving hints.

There are far too many subjects reach the screen whose dénouement is obvious. Not so very long ago we heard

of a director who insisted upon explaining every little point as the story progressed, so that before half the film had been unwound the result could be guessed, being let out by one of the large companies. He was right in trying to make his subjects clear, but he overlooked the fact that the secret—the result of the plot—must be kept hidden almost to the very end in order to hold the interest of the spectators.

Beginners will find it to their benefit, in working out their plots, to try and think that the ending is just opposite of what it is, and making the story run this way as much as possible without its becoming implausible. It is in working it out in this manner that hints are made use of to good advantage, for they both increase the spectators' curiosity and explain the points which are liable to be criticized when the film has been finished.

#### BROADENING.

Learn to think over everything that you come in contact with, whether it be the works of a master or a little newsboy on the corner. Look at everything and every person as an object, and try to get all you can out of each object that crosses your path for use in your fiction work. Study the possibilities of each, their incentive in the world, and, in short, just what they amount to, what they amount to, what they have amounted to, and what they will amount to.

This method of "sizing up things" will bring you closer to life than if you started out to live a life of adventure and will also allow you to continue writing regularly

every day. We know that there are many who will claim that they do not need to study persons and things as they already have more ideas than they can put into scenario form, but these same persons find it very hard to take any idea and work it up into any class of the silent drama desired on short notice. If they had, at their finger tips, a knowledge of life that was broad enough to allow them to draw on it at will and for any purpose desired, they would find no such difficulty.

Just keep your eyes open all the time, and be ever alert for dramatic possibilities in everything that happens about you. Some things will require a very keen insight in order to be recognized, so it is worth dollars and cents to you to develop this.

#### THE ABILITY TO REWRITE.

Recently a photo-play author whom we have always considered very capable had lunch with us, and during our conversation told us that he had just received a script back from a company with the request that he rewrite it along certain lines which were outlined, and that he drop out one of the characters whom the editor considered unfit for screen presentation. When he said that he could not rewrite it, though he had tried, we were surprised.

As we talked the thing over, we soon learned why he couldn't. He had the plot set in his mind as though it had crystallized, and the objectionable character had been frozen in its center. A few carefully worded inquiries gave us the information that he had never rewritten a

script in his life, and that everything he had sold had been disposed of just as it was when he first wrote it. He admitted destroying several scripts which had been rejected by all the companies on his list.

This is a sad example of an author who, though capable in many other ways, has never added to his list of accomplishments the ability to rewrite. He would be useless in a studio, therefore, where men of good, all-around ability are needed who can write and rewrite as ordered. There is no reason why every author or author-to-be should not know how to take a rejected story and turn it into something so utterly different and superior that it is sure to sell. It is simply a matter of allowing your mind to become elastic and keeping it in this condition at all times. A character can be dropped out of any story, or any of the action—even the climax—taken away and something else supplied which will better it, if the writer who does the work is capable.

#### EFFECTS AND PLOTS.

Effects gained by suddenly springing dramatic climaxes are one thing, and honest-to-goodness plots are another. Many beginners get them mixed, and think that, because it would be very dramatic to have the hero dash into the sitting room just as the villain was about to kill the girl's father, the story has a very strong plot.

In every writer's mind these things should be kept distinctly different. He should keep clearly before him the fact that the plot of an acceptable story contains everything which, when elaborated, catches the attention of the



onlooker and holds it to the finish. The effects aid materially in holding the interest, we agree, and also furnish the "high spots" which will be remembered long after the main story has been forgotten. Often the effects are the main punches of a story, but they are useless alone, and must be worked into a logical plot at just the right time. Don't waste a splendid dramatic effect—or single bit of business action—by hastily dashing off a plot to fit it. Sit down and think out a wonderfully strong plot, and then spring your effect at just the right time, and you will have something which stands far better than an even chance of selling.

#### SOME REAL TRUTHS.

Though the article which follows, from one of the Pacific-coast newspapers, was written in a rather light vein, and greatly exaggerates certain conditions, it nevertheless contains some real, honest-to-goodness truths. You can read it through for yourself and see if you agree with the writer:

"Scenario writing, the great international indoor sport of the world!

"At last the Peepul have a whack at art; Parnassus has its Coney Island! the hoi polloi may buy drinks for the Muses.

"Art, to change the figure, is tired of getting a crick in the neck looking up, has come down to dwell among us, donned a kimono, and let down her back hair.

"Everybody, from preachers to pushcart men, from manual-labor musicians to ministers, from elevator boys

to editors, from diplomats to dishwashers, is in the business.

"And the funny part of it is that many times the screen story of the dishwasher is infinitely better than that of the diplomat; the chauffeur's scenario puts it all over that of the champion essay builder of the brow factory; the elevator boy rudely snatches the blue ribbon from the indignant bosom of the editorial writer.

"Reason? The soul of the scenario is action, and the soul of action is contact with life. That's where the cashier girl sometimes grabs the laurel-wreath plum off the brow of the insular literary lady president of the local literary society, who reads Ibsen, still considers 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' the great American novel, and thinks a Turkish corner and cigarettes spell bohemia, and that oyster cocktails are immoral.

"As Frank Woods, head of one of the Mutual scenario departments, puts it: 'There may be a few people who have not written any plays; there are possibly one or two in the world who haven't done a drama in blank verse; and there may be a Hottentot or so who hasn't written a musical comedy, but I'm convinced there isn't a person on earth that hasn't written a scenario.' "

Mr. Woods probably had just finished wading through a batch of hopeless material when he made his statement, and felt that there could have been very few persons on earth who had not contributed to his misery; but it is a fact that in the rank and file of laymen you will find three or four times as many who have written sce-

narios as you will those who have made other "stabs" at literary fame.

The real worth of the article lies in what it says about the soul of the scenario being action, and the soul of action being contact with life. This does not mean, as we explained recently, that a person must live a rough-and-ready life of adventure, or that he must stroll far off the beaten paths; but it does mean that he must be close to the life about him. He must come in contact with it.

A NEW STYLE OF FARCE COMEDY.

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Doubtless many of you have seen the latest Keystone releases in which a noticeable change from the old style of farce appears. Mack Sennett, the wizard of this style of motion-picture plays, has decided that the day of brick throwing, et cetera, is over, and that the comedy of the future must be a little more genteel. To bring his productions up to the new standard he has set for himself, he has secured several well-known actors, who have appeared in what is popularly known as the "polite comedy," and has "toned down" the actions of his own comedians.

This does not mean that Keystone will at once forsake the old style of comedy, but it does mean that you will see many more productions of this kind in the near future than you will of the old variety. From the outside, the change certainly looks like a good one, for if the pictures can be kept as spontaneously funny as some of the past offerings of this company—we do not say all of them—

and also present a sort of finished effect which will make the audiences feel they have seen a real play, there can be no doubt but that the end of the rough-and-tumble picture's life is very near.

Much of the success of the plan will depend on the actors and upon Mr. Sennett and his directors at first, but if this style of comedy becomes popular there will be a splendid market opened to the writer of really humorous plots—a market which has been closed to most writers for a long time.

#### THE METAMORPHOSIS.

Speaking of the gradual "settling down" of the motion-picture industry, a thing which is being watched with interest by millions, William Lord Wright, through his department in the *Dramatic Mirror*, said:

"If there is any limit to what the motion pictures can do and do do, it is yet undiscovered by the general public. Possibly even the producers of the films have not found it. The law of gravitation appears to have been suspended as a special mark of favor to the photo-play writers and producers. Motion-picture actors leap from speeding trains and pick themselves up from the right of way with only a bit of dust on their garments. They descend from exploding dirigibles, drop from the skys'ls yardarms of square-rigged ships, descend into mines and caves on frayed ropes, and hang on the rear axles of jumping motor cars. The animal kingdom affrights them no more than the basic laws of nature. For the artists are to be held in the cages of savage lions and

tigers, daring the dangers of the jungle, making at least the appearance of sport at teasing wild boars and diving into shark-invested tropical waters. Mayhap it is a matter of pride. Mayhap the bold and fearless author writes in these 'bits of business,' and then the actors and the producers get together and determine to show these gosh-dingd 'dopesters' that they cannot imagine any stunt that cannot be accomplished by the right people. We cannot help but think that the business of motion-picture acting and of motion-picture writing has the enthusiasm, the imagination, and the recklessness of youngsters just turned twenty-one. Yet we may expect it in time to sober down—to banish all the impossible romances, take thought of the realities of life, cease to court deathbed scenes, and let the accountant have a word to say as to the expenses. And that is the approaching consummation. Motion-picture securities are being listed, lines of rivalry marked, but to date the limit of its powers has not been established. It is possible that the author has not as yet reached the limit of imaginary flights? We are glad, however, that we have been enabled to see and participate in the industry in the period of quick-throbbing beginning. It is now more exciting and astonishing than it will be when it decides, after all, that life is not made up of impossible occurrences."

His words are about all that are needed on the subject. They point out an undeniable truth—that motion pictures now are flying among the clouds of fancy. It will be but a short time when the public will demand



reality instead of romance from the motion-picture screen, and it is then that the photo-playwright who is able to turn out stories that show the trade-mark of life clearly will have his day. He will be able to write plausible stories that are filled with human interest, and he will be able to give these stories just the right amount of action to keep the interest alive throughout.

Are you, Mr. Writer, preparing for this, or are you following what you believe is the crowd?

A PUZZLE.

"Why should my scripts be rejected by a company who says they would not pass the censors, and who have a printed rejection slip telling the various things forbidden, when I can go to a theater and see pictures out by the same company and containing the forbidden things, untouched by the censors?" we were once asked by a young lady.

That is quite a question, we admit, but we wonder if the questioner did not look at the picture on the screen with a prejudiced mind. There may have been a murder in the film she saw, and her script may have contained a murder. In rejecting it, the editor cited the fact that they could not use murders because of the censors, in order to discourage her use of such incidents in the future, as he saw she did not know how to handle them. In the picture which she saw in the theater, the murder might have been "gotten over" by means of a cut-back, the actual murder not being shown.

There are thousands of suppositions we could make,

but they would all fail to convince because in the amateur's mind a murder in a script is a murder, an accident an accident, and so on. He has not yet learned to appreciate the fact that success or failure lies in the handling of the dangerous element. It takes time and experience to absorb that fact.

The one and only safe way for an amateur to do is to avoid those things the censors are known to frown on, at least in the beginning. After a time he will become more skillful, and will be able to use them without offense. There are plenty of other things to write about, and your scripts will not lack action simply because you have not incorporated a lot of forbidden things into them. Do not think that the editor is trying to furnish an excuse when he tells you your script was returned because certain incidents wouldn't pass the censors. He is under no obligation to furnish an excuse, and the mere fact that he pointed out your weakness shows that he is trying to help you.

#### A DESCRIPTIVE LINE.

Though not at all necessary to sell a script, it is of great benefit to the reader and editor if you run a short descriptive line under the title of your story on the first page of your manuscript, telling the class and length of your play. Thus, if you have written a two-reel modern drama, entitled "The Lost Love," you would arrange it in this manner:

"THE LOST LOVE."

A Two-reel Drama of Present-day Life.

This holds good on all varieties of plays, and allows the person who reads your script to put it into a certain class in his mind at once. If his company is in need of the particular style of play you have submitted, a favorable impression is created at once, and your chances of sale are increased in accordance. It is but very little extra work, and the possible returns certainly are worth the effort.

#### WRITING AND SELLING.

One of the most difficult things for an amateur to realize is that, though many can write scenarios, every one cannot write salable ones. The popular belief seems to be that when the last sheet of the manuscript is removed from the typewriter, all effort on the part of the author ceases, and the editors must hungrily devour the finished product should it be offered to them.

We know it is hard for the beginner to break away from old beliefs, but for his own good we advise him to regard the writing and selling of a scenario as two distinctly different arts, each of which requires no little amount of skill. It is very true that a great deal of energy must be used during the creation of a picture play, but it is equally true, though not generally accepted by new hands at the game, that fully as much energy is needed to direct its sale.

The writer who works earnestly to get a script into proper form, but who does not study the markets carefully, and who sends his script here and there, without any assurance that the companies to whom he mails it

are buying or whether they ever use that type of play, is wasting good time. He may succeed in placing his work "here or there," but it is only by accident, and he seldom repeats.

The careful writer does not go at the thing in such a manner. He works his story out with fully as much pains as the other man, but he keeps his brain alert, after finishing the script, and carefully studies the market for possible purchasers of his product. He *knows* that he is *not* wasting time and postage by sending it to the company that he finally selects, for he is reasonably certain, because of his study of their condition, that they are producing plays along the same general lines as his. And more than half the time he is able to sell his script on its first outing.

We cannot lay too much stress on the selling end of the scenario-writing game. It is something which should command as much study from the writer as the building of the scenario itself. A merchant would fail in no time if he sold his goods in a slipshod way, and, when it comes to the selling end of script writing, the author is nothing more than a merchant. He must do just as a merchant does: study the markets, and sell wherever he can command the best price; keep his eyes open for changes in the mart, and, above all, not try to force his product where there is no possible chance of its being accepted.

We advise beginners to bring themselves to believe, though we know many will find it hard, that there are two distinct arts to be learned under the general heading of

scenario writing. Study all the angles of both, and put into practice all that is learned. Remember that it is a game of brains, and that brains must be used from the time the first idea comes into the mind until after the sale has been completed—and you will note the selecting of markets comes in this period.

#### CONVERSATION IN SCENES.

We know of several films, some of which were big multiple-reel features, which had to be “killed”—thrown away—because scene after scene had too much conversation in it to ever hope to “get over” the meaning clearly. In every case the director was let out, and the writer who prepared the scenario received a “black eye” with the company.

We do not doubt but what many of our readers have seen pictures on the screen which had scenes in them showing two characters engaged in a conversation for several seconds—perhaps a minute, if the clipping department could not spare the footage. While this conversation might have been vitally interesting during the taking of the picture, and might easily have furnished a big “punch” to a play on the speaking stage, it failed utterly to accomplish any purpose on the screen other than to bore the audience. Such scenes are fatal, and the beginner must avoid them.

One must be able to realize just how a scenario will look on the screen in order to eliminate this and other features which are sure to ruin a motion-picture production. The ability to sense how the action would look



when thrown on the screen—or the gaining of the “picture eye,” as Phil Lang, editor of Kalem, once named it—comes only from studying finished productions on the screen and seeing just why they are successful or unsuccessful, as the case may be.

#### ON NUMBERING SCENES.

We can see no reason why a multiple-reel script should not be “scene numbered” straight through from the first to the last scene, without giving any consideration to the division into reels. That is just our view of the case, however, for we know of many who prefer to have reel one numbered from scene one to whatever scene terminates the reel, and then began reel two with another scene one, and so on.

It is one of those points which will probably be covered by a standard script some day—if that day ever arrives—but just at present it is a question open to debate. Here is why we think it is better to number the scenes consecutively straight through a script:

First of all, the principle upon which numbering scenes is founded is one which makes for the convenience of the director. He must designate the scene he is taking in some way, so it is given a number. The scene is essentially a part of the whole play, rather than of the reel, and the director works to put the whole play into form rather than one reel of it. Therefore it seems to us—and we have been told by several directors it is also their opinion—that each scene should be numbered as though

it were part of the play rather than part of any certain reel of the play.

Secondly, it is much more convenient to the cutting-room people—generally including the director—to have only one scene by each number to put into a play. If there is a scene ten for the first, second, and third reels of a picture, it certainly is no easy matter to tell which is which, regardless of how carefully it has been “tabbed.”

In the third place, very few writers can tell just how long a reel will last, and if they start scene one of the second reel at a point which only gives the director seven hundred and fifty feet of action, instead of one thousand feet—the required length for one reel—the entire script must be renumbered—and that takes time. If the script is numbered straight through, it makes little difference whether reel one ends with the crisis which occurs in scene thirty-five or whether it is carried on to the next “punch,” which occurs about scene forty-two. There is no renumbering to be done, and the director is saved a lot of worry.

There are other reasons, too, why we consider the “straight-numbering” system the best, but they are not as important as these. We cannot tell the reader of this book that the other system is unpopular in all studios, for it is not; but we know that the majority of directors prefer to have straight-numbered scripts to work out their multiple-reel productions from. Because authorities have not been able to agree on this point, we are afraid it is up to every writer to select for himself the style that

he chooses to use. Look both of them over for yourself, Mr. Amateur, and pick out the one that seems most reasonable to you.

#### COSTUME AND HISTORICAL PLAYS.

Scenarios for costume and historical plays are the hardest things in the world to market.

There is no use writing this kind of stuff, for the editors cannot purchase it. The only chance an author would ever have of "putting over" a story in which costumes were one of the main features would be in case a certain company happened to be making a big multiple-reel production and used the "props" for a few small, regular-program pictures. Then the chances are that a staff writer would be called in and told just what was needed. It is easy to see that the staff man would be able to give just what was required, whereas, even if the editor happened to have a script from a free lance which required costumes of the same nature, the other props would probably not be worked in.

It is too long a chance for an outsider to take, and we advise free lances to turn out only stuff that will be acceptable to the companies for which it is intended at any time. The way to create scripts of this kind is to eliminate all special costuming and spectacular effects, and throw extra strength into the story to make up for the lacking qualities.

#### A QUESTION OF PAYMENT.

Many authors, even the more experienced ones, are puzzled as to whether comedy or drama pays most in

the motion-picture field. It is a hard thing to decide, and one which can hardly be covered by a single general answer. That comedy is more in demand than drama, considering the smaller number of markets—that far less comedy is purchased than drama, and that comedy is much harder to write than drama, are all undeniable facts, which would seem to place the value of good comedy above that of good drama.

But is it?

Looking over the field, concern by concern, and matching the prices each pays for comedy—if they produce it—and for drama, the latter is found to be quite a bit above the other. In many cases, among the better class of companies, fifty dollars per reel is not considered high for drama, and some writers regularly get one hundred dollars per reel for their material. These figures are founded upon actual fact, and are not in any sense colored, as statements of this kind are apt to be. Taking the same companies' average rate for comedy, we find that it does not average over thirty-five dollars per reel, but in some cases goes as high as sixty-five or seventy dollars.

These figures speak for themselves; but, as we said before, a single answer cannot cover the situation. Undoubtedly there are many persons writing comedy of the sure-fire variety who are getting much more per reel than others working under the same trade-mark who are writing the same variety of drama. Where the writer produces real laugh getters, he will undoubtedly be re-

warded; but the trouble is that few free lances seem to have the ability to write one comedy after another which will take, and, therefore, are merely given so much per reel by the producers, and the rate fixed a little below that paid for drama, because it has become a custom.

#### RELIGION IN PHOTO PLAYS.

Despite the fact that recently some of the big companies released multiple-reel plays with priests, sisters, ministers, et cetera, in them, and that in the past a few successes of the screen have been based upon some religious principle or other, we wish to warn our readers not to write this kind of stuff.

Wherever a play of that kind reaches the screen it must be noted that the subject is handled in a more than ordinary way, and that, as a whole, it is inoffensive to any one, despite their beliefs. Most picture plays of this class are based upon dramas of the stage which have already been passed upon and approved by the public, and which are even more carefully treated on the screen than they were on the stage. But no matter how much pains have been taken to make them nonsectarian, however, there are always a great many who complain to the film companies about them favoring one religion or another.

Because of this sentiment, almost every editor is prejudiced the moment he sees the slightest trace of religion creep into a script he is reading, or the moment he discovers a religious character in one. He is well aware of the fact that if the scenario is accepted and produced it



is sure to cause a stir; and if this stir should continue for any length of time he—the editor—is certain to be called before the boss to explain why he purchased it.

In addition to this fact, there is also a prejudice against religion in photo plays because, while the subject lends itself to the dramatic easily enough, its scope is very limited because of the many beliefs. A script that is based upon religion is almost certain to lack action for this reason, and the editor, through long experience, knows this, and is prejudiced even before beginning to read.

There are so many other themes that are in accord with the thinking of the majority of the masses that it is foolish for a beginner to select a subject of this kind to write a play around. As has often been said before, it is the "general-market" scenario that is of real value to the new script writer, both from the artistic and financial viewpoints, and the religious play can hardly be classed under this heading.

#### THINK.

"I believe I have discovered my failing," once said an author who has been in the game about a year, "and it is my failure to think."

That sentence may convince many of our readers that the author in question has no business in the game, but as we have seen some of his work, and have a pretty good idea of its possibilities, we are inclined to dispute the decision. He is just like some many hundreds of others who have failed to take the photo drama seriously, even though they think they have. Like them, he has

failed to think deeply about every scenario before he put it into form and sent it to the editors; and also, like the others, he has drawn rejection after rejection.

Now he has awakened. He has learned the value of the word "think," and he is applying all his energy to get the most out of his newly acquired knowledge with every script he turns out. The result is that the quality of his scripts has gone up greatly, and two sales have appeared on his "accepted" list that formerly showed none.

We know that many more of our readers that are struggling to succeed are in the same class that this young man is working himself out of. They, too, can advance if they wish. There is only one thing to do, and that is to think, think, and think while they are writing, studying, relaxing; in fact, all the time they are awake. It may seem hard, but it is the easiest way to success in the scenario-writing game.

#### CONCENTRATING.

Do you know that you can get better results by working on one story, or at the most two or three, than if you attempted many and only did part of each?

It is a fact, and most writers find it out after they have got several scenarios started and go from one to another without concentrating on any certain one for any length of time. We know very well that there are some big writers who work best by rotating from one work to another, and keeping several in course of completion at the same time; but these are exceptions rather than

the general rule. We do not think that even these men and women lay down their stories as they finish working on them and forget all about them until they again pick them up; but, instead, they probably carry the plots about in their minds, and, either consciously or subconsciously, are working them out all the time.

While it certainly is not advisable for a writer to have but one idea on hand to work into a scenario, and, when this is completed, be at a loss as to what to do next, it is advisable to forget everything else when one sits down to work out a certain plot. Exclude all other plays from the mind, and concentrate all the mind on the single plot before you, and we believe you will get much better results than if you only worked on the scripts a half hour or so, and then, because you thought of another play you could work out, laid aside the first one to work on the other.

#### A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT.

If you, friend reader, were holding down a job which paid a fine salary at the end of every week and you realized that there were many other capable men in the country who could do the same work you were doing, and perhaps do it a little better than yourself, wouldn't you strive to do what was required of you in the best manner possible? If what was required of you was the reading of and passing on many manuscripts per day for the purpose of finding available scenarios for your employer, and if you knew—as you should and probably would—that these manuscripts came from the men and women

who would in the future supply you with material which would enable you to hold your job, wouldn't you do your best to see that they received a fair deal?

The answer to both the above questions is, without a doubt: "Certainly!"

Then why do so many amateurs complain about the treatment they receive at the hands of editors and accuse these persons of "stealing their plots"?

We know there are many beginners who do not do this, but there are many more times as many who do. We think it is due largely to ignorance of the existing conditions and lack of ability to get the "other fellow's viewpoint"; or, in other words, to see things as the editor sees them. They do not seem to realize that the editors have to earn a living the same as themselves, and that the editor's livelihood depends upon his ability to supply his company with good scenarios. If they had this fact foremost in their mind, they would know that no editor in his right sense would try to do anything which might cost the company the future work of a photo-playwright. The rankest beginner may some day become the star writer, and no one knows this better than the editor.

Broaden out and give the editor credit for knowledge enough to hold down his position in acceptable style. Then work along and be content to let him pass judgment on what your brain produces. Accept his decisions as final, and avoid being a member of the class known as "kickers."

## USING PEOPLE'S NAMES.

This subject has been treated so often before that it seems to be a waste of time to again bring it before our readers, but we think it advisable to warn beginners not to use the names of friends—or other persons—in their photo-play scenarios.

When a script is produced which carries the name of a real person in its cast, said person may cause a lot of trouble which, though it may not be very serious, will nevertheless be unpleasant and will give the writer a "black eye" with the film company who bought his story. Any one with imagination can easily create names for characters without resorting to those from real life. Try to make your names fit your characters, but because you know a fellow named Jim Fox who is "just too grand," or a sweet girl named Alice Brown, do not think you have to name your hero and heroine after them. Jim and Alice might not like the idea as well as you do.

## TWO VALUABLE SUGGESTIONS.

"Would it not be better," we were once asked, "to have the synopsis of a scenario written on the first sheet all by itself so that it may be used by the advertising department after the picture has been produced? And is it not better to mention the number of "extra" people required for groups when making out the cast, such as ten policemen, four tramps, et cetera?"

The ideas embodied in the two questions are very worthy of consideration, we believe. It is one of the heartburns of the advertising man to try to "line up"



stories on the pictures his company is releasing, for the synopsis is seldom forthcoming. If the synopsis were on a separate sheet of paper from the script, instead of having the scene action begin where the synopsis stopped, we think it might be possible that a kind-hearted director would hand the ad man the sheet. At any rate, it would increase the possibility of his getting a synopsis and might make another friend within the studio for the writer. We do not strongly indorse this, but we offer it as a mighty good suggestion. The gain may not be great even if the writer adopts the ssystem, but it will be a little boost, and every little boost helps.

Anent the numbering of 'extras' there has been some previous discussion. Personally we believe there is no harm done in giving the approximate number of persons a writer believes should be used in a scene, for it may help to convey to the director's mind the suggestion of just how "big" the author intended the scene to be. The exact number of "extras" to be used rests in the director's hands, however, but most directors are open for suggestions at all times, and the more the writer makes the better the director likes him. Like the other suggestion, it may gain a friend on the "inside" for the author.

#### SPECIALTIES.

When you sit down to write an animal, child, sea, mountain, society, or any other kind of a story, you must know something about the style of script you are about to write. There are many authors who excel in child

scripts who could not turn out an acceptable mountain story if they tried for months. The successful writer knows this, and tries to stay within his field; but the amateur, not knowing himself, is liable to wander far from "home" and wonder why the "stuff" he writes does not sell.

At the very beginning of his career, a writer must try to become versatile, but he should also try to discover his specialty and work on it most of the time. You will find, in looking over the list of "big men" in both the fiction and photo-play-writing field, that all have some special style of story they write best. Of course, all write other styles occasionally, but their real successes are scored with their favorite type.

Experiment and discover yourself when you are young in the game, and then work continuously to become versatile enough to supply an editor with anything he calls for; at all times, however, remembering that your "specialty" must not be neglected.

#### BASIC FACTS.

Many amateurs are handicapped by lack of knowledge of the basic facts regarding the mechanics of the motion-picture industry, and for the benefit of these writers we will give a brief outline of some of the things every one connected with the film business should know. This may prove helpful also to many writers who have been producing successful scripts, for we find that those who have obtained a footing in the work are liable to become careless and forget things they once knew.

First of all, motion pictures are really nothing but a succession of still pictures, taken in such rapid succession that the subjects photographed appear to move about the screen just as though they were live persons. About one foot of film is exposed per second in taking motion pictures, and about twelve "frames," or separate pictures, make up a foot. These figures are approximate. One thousand feet of film is supposed to make a reel, but most companies go either a few feet over or less, though not to any great length. The unreeling of a thousand-foot film, therefore, takes about seventeen minutes.

Some studios are entirely indoors, while others are just set up in the open air. In California, most of the companies work in the latter way; also in the South. Stock companies are employed by all concerns, as are directors. The business of the latter class is to assume charge of the scenario when it has been completed by the writer and deliver to the company a complete celluloid subject. Therefore, the director is really the king-pin of the studio, but has to wait until he secures a scenario before beginning to work.

The finished production is shipped to exchanges by the manufacturing company, and these exchanges arrange with the exhibitors for its showing.

It is well to bear in mind, when writing a scenario, just how many people will pass judgment on it before it has run its course. Consideration of the various angles of the business, as sketched above, will bring this forcibly to mind. We also think that every student of the silent

drama should learn as much as possible about the art of making motion pictures. Of course, many writers have attained more or less success in the movie world without any great knowledge of its working, but these writers are graced with an elaborate set of ideas, and their plots command attention despite all else. A photoplaywright will never lose by having in the back part of his mind at all times a complete knowledge of the basic principles of motion pictures and as much auxiliary knowledge as he can gather.

#### GETTING IDEAS.

We all think we have ideas which will fit nicely into photo plays, but when we look them over with cold, critical eyes and start to "weed them out," they slowly simmer down until we have practically nothing left. It is therefore necessary that we have a new supply to draw from.

The amateur gets the ideas he has on hand out of his system and then becomes panic-stricken. He wants to write, but he does not know what to write about. Then it is necessary to get busy and secure some ideas, but he is at a loss where to look. Had the amateur started his search for ideas before he sat down to work out his first plot, and kept up the search diligently, he would not be "dry."

Getting ideas is merely keeping one's eyes open at all times and considering everything one comes upon as possible plot material. Much has to be discarded at once as

unsuitable, but every day should yield many ideas that can be used at some future time.

The writer who merely gets ideas as he goes along may be compared to the Indian of old, who gorged himself in time of plenty and starved in time of famine. It is the steady, thoughtful method of securing ideas, rather than the hand-to-mouth system, that makes a writer fit for the long, steady grind of the professional. Begin at once, those of you who have not been storing up ideas, and never let up until you renounce writing forever—a time which never comes to any one who is once an author.

#### READING THE CLASSICS.

We are willing to wager that the majority of beginners in the scenario-writing field never even think of reading the classics, but therein is contained a splendid education. Books which have come down through ages are filled with thoughts that are far deeper than those contained in books which are popular one year and forgotten the next. They are inspiration themselves, and actually force a young writer to give his own work much thought.

#### A VETERAN DIRECTOR'S VIEWS.

In an interview recently published, Otis Turner, the veteran director of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company, expressed some highly interesting viewpoints, which we present herewith for the benefit of our readers. Hugh C. Weir was the interviewer:

"Action!" Otis Turner, the veteran producer of Universal City, repeated the word for emphasis, as he pointed



a long, nervous finger at me in the library of his cozy bungalow.

The pointing finger now tapped his knee. "There can be no successful photo play," he continued, "without action. But there is not one author in ten who appreciates the real meaning of action. Usually he thinks the definition of the word consists in just making things happen, or stringing together a succession of events. He doesn't stop to ask himself if these events are logical, if they could actually happen in real life, or, better yet, if they could happen to his particular characters in the condition in which he has introduced them. Logical, convincing, sustained action is one of the hardest qualities to secure in a photo play, and one of the most important. If the author can really build his play with action, the kind of action that his audience can grasp at the start and follow without a brain storm, he has mastered one of the fundamental rules of photo-play writing.

"This does not mean, understand, that his plot must be elaborate, or evolved, or full of unexpected twists and turns and surprises. In fact, the most successful photo play is the most simple one, the play in which the action is introduced from the first scene and kept going in a clear, logical sequence until the last fade-out. To do this successfully, the characters who are to make the action must first, of course, be established in a clear, definite, convincing manner. The audience must be introduced to the persons of the play before they can find any great amount of interest in the play. It is one of my first rules,

in building a scenario, to devote my opening scenes to a thorough establishment of my characters, and if, in doing so, I can also establish the motives that are to influence those characters in the development of the play, I consider the hardest part of my work done. If, for instance, my cast is to consist of four principals, I aim always to make my audience familiar with those characters and the conditions surrounding them before I attempt any great development of my plot. If the spectator knows at the start that Mary is a millionaire's daughter, with a strong interest in uplift work; that neither father, nor the man whom her father wants her to marry, is in sympathy with her, but that she has met a young missionary who admires her ideals, and helps to build them, I then have a clear track ahead of me in developing the action of my play. I know that my audience is familiar with the persons I am talking about, and that it should not be difficult to follow the events into which I propose to take them.

"Here is one of the great features in which the drama of the screen differs from the drama of the stage and the drama of the novel. On the stage, you can always establish your cast by dialogue, if necessary, after the action itself is under way. The same method can be followed in the novel. On the screen, your characters can only be established by action, and they must be clearly in the eye of the audience before you can hope to do much in building your play. And this action must be such that it can be photographed—without involved subtitles or

explanations. The audience must be able to visualize on the instant not only the person in the foreground, but the salient characteristics and motives of that person. If this impression is not immediate and clear, the most elaborate plot ever evolved will fall short of its purpose."

"By the way," I said suddenly, "what was the first photo play you ever wrote? Tell me about it. The story must be interesting."

"Do you think so?" returned Mr. Turner dryly. "It was very painful to me, I assure you." And then he stopped to chuckle reminiscently. "It happened like this: I had spent a lifetime on the legitimate stage. I thought I knew about everything there was to know in the construction of a play. When I considered the field of moving pictures, it was my firm belief that all I needed was to hang up my hat in my office, go out on the lot with a camera man and a company and make big pictures. I suppose other persons have had the same ideas—if they would tell the truth. I remember that I had read a poem somewhere which appealed to me very much. I thought it would be a beautiful photo play. Secure in this belief, I put it into scenario form, as I thought it should be done, and prepared to make the picture. After one week of following the camera man, I went home and tore up that scenario, fearful that some one might stumble on it by accident—and read it!

"That was the only time I ever made the mistake of thinking that the making of a film play was an easy proposition. I have never made the same mistake again."

"If you were to sum it all up, what advice would you give the amateur scenario writer?" I asked.

"Get to work," said Mr. Turner tersely. "Learn the business, or art, or profession, or trade, or whatever you want to call it; and remember that it cannot be learned without actual experience and apprenticeship. I believe that every truly successful photo-playwright must first know the technical requirements of picture making. He must know what can be done with the camera and what cannot. He must know just what he is trying to do before he can hope to make any kind of success. The average writer for the film does not know—and then wonders why he fails to get ahead."

#### ENJOY YOUR WORK.

If you sit down to work out a scenario with a secret dread of the effort it is going to cost you, your work will be labored all through, and it is better not to try to write at all; but if you begin your script filled to overflowing with enthusiasm about it, the chances are more than even that it will prove a success.

It takes an amateur a long time to realize this fact, and as a result he works under a handicap a great deal of the time. Not that he dislikes the idea of scenario writing at all; on the contrary, he thinks there is nothing like it in the world. The trouble lies in the actual work. It is very enjoyable for him to think in a distant sort of way that he will write five two-reel scripts during the coming month, and he has a dim outline of what each

will be about. He may tell some of his friends certain "ins and outs" of the "game," and carry on a fairly intelligent conversation with some writer who has made good. But when it comes to writing, those five two-reelers and all the easy part of script writing disappears, this same amateur, nine times out ten, shrinks from the task and begins to write with a longing that it was all over and that the script was on its way to the editors, or that he was opening the envelope containing the check it may bring.

Scenario writing is a game of minds, and, when a person's mind is in this condition, the spirit of the thoughts he places on paper are sure to be conveyed to the person who takes up his work to pass judgment on it—the reader or editor of the film company. The man who looks over the script will clearly see the marks of "I wish it were all over," and if he is a man who reaches a decision quickly, he will stop reading right in the middle and slip the script into the return envelope. The way to avoid this is to get chock-full of your story. Study it from all its different angles, and enthuse about its possibilities. Take as much interest in your characters as you would in your friends in real life, and allow your situations to thrill you fully as much, if not more, than you want them to thrill the public, who will later see them. Thus the whole spirit of your work is lifted out of the listless class. Ideas will come to you you could never get by working indifferently, and the result is that when the editor or reader looks over your script he will



straighten up in his chair and read it carefully from start to finish with much the same spirit that you wrote it.

#### OLD STORIES.

Many beginners write to us to learn if it is acceptable to "remember" old magazine stories, plays, novels, et cetera, when writing photo plays and use them either in whole or part. To all these inquiries we emphatically say "No!" Then the writers wonder why we say that sometimes old themes can be used in a new way.

There is an art in taking an old situation, or one which has been used before, and putting it into a new play in such a manner that it appears absolutely fresh. Just how much chance the amateur has of acquiring this art during the first or second year he is writing is quite a question, and that is why we do not think it safe for newcomers to try to "lift" situations and "twist" them into a new shape.

To take a novel means by which a man found happiness in the South Sea Islands and to apply the same means to a woman who lives in New York City's highest society would be permissible if it were made an incident to some big theme and were fully disguised; but to make the New York person a man and send him to the South Sea when he wanted to find happiness, and then have him go through almost the same routine as the man in the original story did would be deliberately taking another writer's ideas. It is in changing the viewpoint of the situation so as to make it appear entirely new that is

legitimate. The original should be used only as sort of an inspiration from which a new idea may spring.

“OVERSTOCKED.”

When an ambitious author gets a rejection slip with several reasons printed upon it, and “Overstocked” checked off, he is usually much puzzled as to what is meant.

We cannot say that this, coming from certain film companies, means any particular reason why the script was turned down, but, like most rejection slips, merely implies that the script is not available to that company. If the editor really meant what “Overstocked” would imply, there would be little use for the writer to submit to the company again until he learned that a change in the market had taken place, for the company would probably not buy any outside scripts while they had enough on hand. We know of cases, however, where this reason was checked, and where the same writer who received the rejection sold a script to the same company less than two weeks later.

When a company is out of the market it usually announces the fact to the departments in magazines devoted to photo-playwrights, and the close student of the game, therefore, does not have to worry about what is marked on the rejection slip. There are some companies which at certain times do not announce these changes, however, and thus the outsider is liable to be at a loss to know just what the relative value of the checked statement really has. We think if editors will be a little more

careful about telling writers just when they are in the market and what material they desire, both by way of photo-playwrights' departments and rejection slips, there will be less useless submissions. In justice to the men passing judgment on scenarios, however, it must be said that they are doing very well along this line at the present time. Our warning is sounded for the future, for we believe that it will not be very long before many changes in market requirements will take place, owing to the shifting of forces in the political end of the film game. In the meantime, scenario writers must take the reason "Overstocked," and others like it, at their face value and weigh their weight by what is known of the company's market requirements from outside sources.

A NEW ANGLE.

Augustus Rodgers, a photo-playwright, of Red Bank, New Jersey, has written us that he is making a study of the various ways of expressing the actions of actors and actresses as they appear on the screen, so that when he wishes to describe "business" in his own scripts he will have a regular "motion-picture vocabulary" to draw from. The idea is an excellent one, and one which we are sure many have been working out almost subconsciously while watching pictures on the screen.

It is applied thus: You go into a theater and settle down in your favorite seat to watch the subject on the screen. The actress who is playing the leading rôle comes on and hurries about the room. You mentally figure out just what you would say—if you were writing the

scene into a scenario of your own—to get the same action on her part. The hero enters, and there is action between the actress and him. Again you figure mentally just what you would say to get the result. Repeat this, scene after scene, picture after picture, show after show, and you will find that in time you will have the ability to describe any action that you have in mind clearly. When you find some action that seems especially hard to express on paper, work and study over it. Get it down clearly in as many words as needed. Then go over it and reduce the number of words in the sentence without changing the meaning in the least.

We believe that repetition of this exercise will prove a wonderful help in getting the words in scripts down to a minimum also, for it will give the writer the power to express his thoughts in “motion-picture terms.”

#### SMILES AND FROWNS.

We all like smiles, and we all dislike frowns.

In scenario writing, the compliments we receive for our work are the smiles, and the criticisms are frowns. Naturally we like the former and dislike the latter.

But when the acid test is applied we think you will agree with us that the frowns are the most valuable, for they are friendly frowns. Take advantage of all the criticisms that you receive on your work to improve, do not think that some one is trying to belittle your efforts for personal reasons, for any one who is capable of criticizing a photo play intelligently will not waste time doing spite work. It isn't worth it to him. Also, accept

the compliments, thank the givers, and file them away if they be written, or place them in your "memory file," if they be oral, as sweet remembrances—nothing more.

USE THE PRESENT TENSE.

Present tense should always be used in writing a photo play, both the synopsis and detailed scene action.

That statement undoubtedly bores many, even those who are beginners at the game, but we are willing to gamble that it comes as a distinct surprise to many more who have won reputation for themselves in the literary world and who have been told by friends that writing photo plays "was just like writing short stories, only easier."

The reason for using this tense is quite obvious. The actions described in the script are constantly recurring in the author's, the editor's, the director's, and the actor's minds until the production has been transferred to films, and then it recurs again in the minds of all those who "go over" the finished reels with the script in their hands to see that it is in perfect form. Thus, you see, that to all those who have anything to do with the script in production, the action is never past—therefore it is written in the present tense.

Some writers use past tense in certain parts of their synopsis, where they are describing a vision scene which carries the story backward. This seems all right, if handled correctly, but there is a great danger with this system, so it is better—at least in the beginning—to use the present tense at all times.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

Perhaps the most hopeful sign of success on the part of a young writer is his total lack of assumed airs. When a beginner throws off the cloak of sham, gets right down to rock bottom, and admits he knows very little about the work he is trying to do, but states that he is willing to learn, it is more than an even bet that it will not be many months before he registers his first sale, and that his first sale will be a long way from his last.

Recently we received a letter from a young San Francisco writer which read as follows:

"In studying, week by week, I learn many things that I never knew existed before. Like many others who are trying to write scenarios, I at first underestimated the requirements of the art—and the farther I go the more certain I become that it is an art—but a careful study of your helps and a thorough application of all I have learned to the pictures I see on the screen and to my own scripts has convinced me it is a difficult field to enter, but one well worth striving for."

That tells the story between the lines. This writer is not going around to his friends and posing as a genius who sits down in rare moments and "dashes off" scenarios, the production of which the world awaits with eager interest. He is just going along quietly, and learning. He knows why certain things are being done in certain ways, and some of these days, when he has an idea for a scenario of his own, he will be able to put it together correctly. He may not sell right away, but, as

we said before, it will not be very long before he receives his first check. Then the chances are that it will not "turn his head." He will be sensible, and will go along just as he has been doing, and study and work. Time will do the rest for him, but unless we are mistaken he is now progressing swiftly along the road which leads to the door of the studio office, and in the scenario division a desk and chair are waiting for him.

#### COLLABORATION.

Many photo-playwrights believe that if they had some one to work with them better results could be obtained, and the question of whether they are right or wrong in their belief certainly opens an excellent problem for debate.

It is one of those things in which we hesitate to say "yes" or "no," for we feel that both answers could be either correct or incorrect. Without a doubt, if two writers got together who could work in harmony and who would not disagree over the many points which are sure to come up during the planning and writing of a scenario, the intermingling of their ideas would be profitable to both, and the work would probably be more pleasant. But take two writers whose temperaments crossed, and there would indeed be an unpleasant time.

Working alone, a writer often feels he needs some one to help him, but in the moment of triumph—when an acceptance has been received—he is glad that he worked alone, and that he does not have to share his rewards with another. There is, perhaps, a strong element of

selfishness in the creation of photo plays or fiction. The author likes to feel that the work is his own, alone, and that others who handle it after it has passed from his hands are merely interpreters. This fact alone seems to be a strong argument against collaboration, but there are many examples of successful plays written by two people, especially in the spoken drama.

#### UNITY.

One of the greatest delights of a creative mind is to turn out a piece of work which can be looked upon as a complete unit, every part of which has some bearing on the rest. This is especially true with writers, since it is so much easier to write a story whose incidents wander hither and thither without restraint.

Unity of conception and development, however, is as difficult to achieve as it is enjoyable to behold. First of all, the idea which the author chooses to build his play upon must be one which easily lends itself to a single line of development. It is conservative to say that about seventy-five per cent of the ideas which come to an average writer are not in this class. Whether he is skillful enough to work it around to a point where it will have but a single angle or not depends on his own ability.

Granted that it will lend itself to single development, the writer still has to contend with the problem of working it out along this line. Perhaps it will seem to him that if he could switch off onto another course at some point of the plot, the story would be benefited. By looking over the idea carefully, however, he will discover that

if he varies from the course he has chosen, he will spread the interest. Therefore he must apply the acid test to everything which he puts in the plot to see if it is really a part of the whole.

By following the chosen line of development religiously and rejecting everything which threatens to spoil the single effect, the writer may turn out a script which is certain to hold the audience's interest when it is shown upon the screen, because it is a perfect example of unity.

#### PICTURES BEING RECOGNIZED.

In a recent New York interview, Rex Beach, the noted author, was quoted as saying that he believed motion pictures were benefiting literature. A short time later, Robert Mantell signed a contract with an Eastern producing company "because he had been convinced that the present-day motion pictures were fully as artistic, if not more so, than the average stage production."

Those are two examples from the many which daily come to the attention of those in filmland, and which go to prove that motion pictures are at last being recognized as the important factor that they really are. It is probably because the screen has never been really acknowledged at its real value, even by those whose hearts and souls are in motion pictures, that the photo-playwright has never risen to the position he should hold. There is no reason why a person who writes photo plays for the masses—and the masses who see the motion-picture play are truly cosmopolitan—should not receive fully as much

credit as his brother and sister writers who turn out plays for the speaking stage or literature for the magazines.

True though it is that it may be easier to write a photo play than a stage drama, that is no reason the author of the former should be slighted, for his work certainly reaches more people, and will probably do more good than that of the latter. We are considering now not only the writers of features, but also the author of single and double-reel stories, for all have their place in the film world.

Roy L. McCardell, author of "The Diamond from the Sky," and a veteran photo-playwright and novelist, touches on this matter in an article dealing with past and present conditions in the photo-playwriting field published in *The Moving-picture World*. We present Mr. McCardell's story here in part, without comment, as the viewpoint of one writer who has gained the top of the ladder:

"Manufacturers have ignored the value of a good story written for the screen by men and women of the highest literary ability. These leading fiction writers of America could not and would not write moving pictures for the reason that the pay was pitiful, and the treatment they received at the hands of the average scenario department of even the largest companies disgusted them.

"I have fought the good fight in moving pictures for fifteen years. In these fifteen years I have clamored at the studio doors, and have had experiences that would have dismayed and discouraged all save a few of us of



the faithful. I have written hundreds of screen stories, many of which have been butchered by bad and stagy direction, and some that have been greatly helped by good direction and capable and sincere acting.

"At this point I wish to state that the moving-picture art industry would have long ago collapsed had it not been for some fifty most able and intelligent directors. I cite Griffith, Ince, Sennett, Powell, Taylor, and Baker—there are many more whose names will readily occur to those who love and know good pictures.

"For years I would not do feature films or four or five reels because the money offered was beneath contempt. Finally William Fox offered me a price commensurate with the careful and painstaking way I write a scenario. As a result, I adapted 'A Fool There Was' for the screen in five reels, and Frank Powell directed it like the genius he is, and the Fox service has a feature that satisfies and makes money.

"It is the same way with serials. 'The Diamond from the Sky' is my first serial. Its success is due to the fact that I have carefully prepared the scenario and the most efficient and enthusiastic organization is behind me, from the director, W. D. Taylor, to the experts in the Chicago laboratory of the American Film Company—not to mention a wonderful cast of young screen stars—not old, hidebound mummers of the now defunct speaking stage.

"I would never do a serial previous to 'The Diamond from the Sky,' although I have several outline scenarios

for serials—because the pay offered would have been scorned by a ragpicker.

“I have to smile at the many letters I receive which allude to my ‘great success,’ and which also state, ‘of course, you, being on the inside, can sell all you write and get prompt action on all your work and the biggest prices.’

“It is to laugh, not alone smile! Until recently every experienced writer who can write, and who has endeavored to write for the moving pictures, was up against the most disheartening conditions at most of the big studios.

“For years I have endeavored to get such writers of my acquaintance as Albert Payson Terhune and other leading American authors to write directly for the screen. When they attempted to do so, the unpleasant and exasperating treatment and delay—not to mention the pitiful prices they were offered, almost queered me with them.

“A writer who can write has worked at and studied his profession for years. He has invested heavily in his tools and instruments—his library. To write scenarios with any degree of efficiency entails the same care and training that it takes to write fiction successfully. I do not write a one-reel scenario that does not cost me twenty-five dollars. My expenses, the expenses, past and present, of any trained, educated, and practiced writer, are heavy. Because a surgeon gets five thousand dollars for an operation, or a lawyer may win twenty thousand dollars in one fee is no reason that would lead a writer

to try to perform a major operation or plead a great case in court.

"It is time the film manufacturers learn, and I think they have learned, that only trained and experienced writers can write convincingly for the screen. It is idle for the film companies to purchase the picture rights to successful old plays or new books and magazine articles, and then expect these to be made into good scenarios by incompetent 'scenario editors.'

"Much could also be said about the jarring effects of old stock-company stage business and settings. Moving pictures are a newer and higher art. The fustian and claptrap of the speaking stage killed the speaking stage—and now old stage actors and old stage directors are flocking into moving pictures and presenting this same fustian and claptrap for the screen!

"The screen depicts life! The camera is unsparing of age and stilted action and emotion. It must have youth and naturalness. If an actress, for instance, is depicting a character, be it *Orphan Annie* or *Marcia van Style*, the heiress just out of Vassar, the actress must be these characters from life, not a grimacing stock-company sourette with a vapid grin and a mop of false curls.

"Moving pictures is the new art and the true art. In its every phase it makes for sincerity, and again sincerity—sincerity in comedy and drama alike. And this sincerity must permeate the story and the depiction with lifelike fidelity.

"And it is all so simple. We do not need 'hokum,'

as our stage friends would say. All we need to do is to pay the easy and earnest tribute of naturalness to 'The Gods of Things as They Really Are.' "

BIG THEMES.

An article written by Russell E. Smith and published in *Pictures and Picturegoer*, a London motion-picture magazine, some time ago, treats the subject of big themes by photo-playwrights. We have been impressed by the lack of big original screen productions, as has almost every one else who studies the screen closely. There seems to be an opportunity for some enterprising concern to come along and make truly big films, written originally for the screen by capable writers, and which will last in the history of the silent drama instead of being merely a feature for a few months and then a discard.

Mr. Smith's article reads as follows:

"Many photo-playwrights are complaining that the fiction author of note is taking in more money for his plots, in proportion, than the strictly photo-play-writing author.

"Aside from the advertising value of said fiction author's name, there is another reason: The average photo-playwright is lacking in the *big idea*—the big theme. The fiction author who has won his spurs in his line of writing has long been in the habit of writing big themes—he has to, in order to turn out a long, salable novel or four-act play.

"The average photo-playwright does not seem to be able to furnish the producer with really big ideas or themes; at least, he doesn't do so. Whether he cannot or

whether he doesn't find it worth while, and prefers to keep his big themes for a play or novel is indeterminate.

"Based on long experience, the average photo-play author does not understand or grasp the meaning of the word 'big' as applied to the photo play. He is nearly always apt to translate the word as 'size' and scope of action, rather than size and scope of *theme*.

"Ask the average author, even the fiction author of experience, for a really big picture story, and what do you get? A picture story containing shipwrecks, a train wreck, an aeroplane battle in the sky, and vast armies battling o'er the plains!

"He thinks it is big because it has large masses of people in it; because it will cost a lot of money, and because there are 'big' wrecks and suchlike sensations.

"That the 'bigness' of the story should lie in its theme, its subject, and the moral it teaches is apparently far beyond him, and the only time he does submit a really big theme it is such that the cost would be far beyond what it is worth. And, furthermore, nine out of ten of the 'big ideas' he submits are adaptations of a biblical story! This may sound unjust to the author, but it is a fact.

"Name me a number of really big original photo plays that have been produced to date—big in theme, moral, et cetera. I dare you!

"'The Birth of a Nation,' biggest of all to date, was original in treatment, but mostly historical facts—the bigness was *not* in the tremendous battle scenes—in the as-



sassination scene, but in its *theme*—and its treatment by the master director. But its theme was not original for the screen.

“‘Cabiria?’ A spectacle, big only in that sense, and an adaptation at that!

“‘Quo Vadis?’ An adaptation!

“‘Judith of Bethulia?’ An adaptation, original only in its masterly direction and treatment.

“‘The Battle of the Sexes’ and ‘The Woman and the Law,’ by Griffith, are the only really big original screen dramas so far produced.

“‘The Birth of a Nation’ has proven that people will sit through twelve reels of a really big subject and pay two dollars a seat, and stand hours in long lines day and night in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco for the privilege. Thus it has at last been shown that there will be a market for big original themes for pictures, and that the screen is worthy of the highest possible effort to supply it with subjects and stories worthy of the newer literature.

“For the really big thoughts, written solely and entirely for the screen, the screen and the public are waiting. Who will write them?

“Can’t our present-day photo-playwrights do it? Or are they written out, or have they been forced so long to grind out mere ‘plots’ with no reason for being except to tell a story that they cannot think big thoughts, and big has come to mean only size?

“Are you going to let the fiction author beat you at your

own game? Has the average photo-play 'plot' been so easy to evolve that you have been lulled into a sense of security from invasion?

"Isn't it a fact that very few plots on the screen would be strong enough, original enough to sell as first-class short stories? Isn't it a fact that the fiction author has not given his best to the photo play? That he has saved his best stuff for the magazines, which pay him better and advertise his name?

"But isn't he going to beat you at your own game, now that the photo play has reached the best theaters and has begun to be accepted as the newer and better literature?

"Now that it will be worth his while financially and artistically, isn't he going to use his trained mind—trained to think big plots and themes—for the benefit of the screen? And will he do better than the average photo-playwright, once he gets the grasp of picture needs, or will the photo-playwright be forced to develop a sense of bigness in theme? These are questions to be thought over in your own mind, and not for me to answer for you. But it is gospel! One more question for you to worry about: How many present-day photo-playwrights ever wrote a plot long enough for a salable four-act play or a ninety-thousand-word novel?

"We await a list."

All that Mr. Smith says about the average photo-playwright being unable to write big ideas carries a great deal of weight; but, as we said before, we think there is an opportunity for some manufacturer to get in on un-

broken ground. It would not require a great many writers with big ideas to enable a concern to turn out original features, written especially for the screen, and we are pretty sure that there are enough authors of this kind willing to write exclusively for the screen if the proper financial inducement is offered.

#### NAMES OF REAL CITIES.

While it is not advisable to use the names of real people for your characters, we think the interest in a photo play is increased by using the names of real cities wherever such names are required. You all know it leaves sort of a disappointed feeling in you when you see a real lifelike modern drama in which some city's name has been invented as the locale of the play. It would be ever so much better if a real city's name had been used, for we would then feel that it had something more substantial to the plot. The objection is that people in the neighborhood of the city named know the scenery to be false, but this is really a trivial matter when we consider how many thousands of other persons see the picture who know nothing about the country near the place named. Then, too, many plays could be laid in the locale where they were filmed.

#### TO ENTER A STUDIO.

The ambition of almost every young writer who is just entering the scenario game is to become a staff writer. He has dreams of the day in time to come when he will hold down a desk next to other writers whom he knows by reputation, and will be able to sell everything

he writes. We say dreams, because he knows little of the real inner workings of the studio. Perhaps, if he knew the story of successful writers, he might think differently of the matter—perhaps not—but in either case that is another story.

If the beginner is really determined to go to the top and win for himself a place with some big manufacturing company, there are many, many obstacles for him to overcome. First of all, he must realize that he is an amateur. That sounds easy, but it is really harder and more important than actual writing at first. He must start out to learn all the ins and outs of the scenario work and the general principles of the motion-picture business itself. Granted that he has some original ideas to begin with, he must search about and add to these steadily. He must make himself a fountain of ideas. He must study the screen, and see how others do the things he wishes to do. In short, he must prepare himself along every necessary line of the work until he feels that he knows something about scenario writing.

Not until then do we think he is ready for actual writing. By this time he has realized that working his way to the top is far from easy, and has either decided to fight the rest of the hard battle or give up altogether. If he chooses the former course, he must settle down to a long, hard grind. He must work with pains, intelligence, and speed. He must turn out many scripts before he can justly expect success to come to him. But they must be more than mere "scripts." They must be sce-

narios that are unusual and attractive and capable of securing and holding any editor's attention. During this period he must be "on his toes" at all times for the general market conditions for his work. There is no use writing a scenario unless he can dispose of it, and the only way to do that is to know where to send it. He must study this subject just as fully as he did the subject of writing itself, for it is almost equally as important.

Again we will take a point for granted, viz., that he has gained fair success in the open market. Now there comes a time for another change. He must pick out the company for whom he wishes to work, and must concentrate on them. He must see as many of their released pictures as possible, and study the synopses of all the rest. He must learn the roster of the company from the president down to the second-string leads. He must try to discover the peculiarities of all its directors and leading players, and learn what the general policy of the company is. Then he must model his own work along these lines, never submerging his own personality, however. Whether success will come or not will then depend entirely upon how well the writer has prepared himself, and upon how capable he is of turning out scripts that will appeal to the selected company.

The campaign we outlined in so few words above should cover a long space of time. In some cases it will be longer than others, for some writers are more gifted than their fellow workers. In any case, however, we



do not think the time could possibly be less than a year and a half or two years. Recently a writer of our acquaintance landed a place with an Eastern concern which he has strived for three full years. There is no use of a writer deceiving himself into thinking he is an exception to the rule, and that he can force his way from a place among the unknowns into a studio in a short space of time. The writer who does not try to represent things to himself as they are not has already got a splendid start in his climb toward the top.

In working out your own future, much judgment will be required to tell just when you are ready to pass from one step to another. No one will be able to judge this accurately except yourself, and we feel justified in saying that avoiding mistakes in this particular is about half the battle. It's a long fight, and there are many variations to the plan we outlined, but we think they all are along the same general lines. The best we can do is to outline a course of this kind for our writer readers, and then help them all the way along the line—a thing which we will gladly do at all times.

#### A PANORAM SCENE EXPLAINED.

The word "panoram," in relation to a scenario, seems to be bothering many writers. This is a very simple matter, and we wonder why it should prove complex to so many. A panoram or panoramic view in motion pictures means a scene taken along the same lines as a still panoramic view would be. For example, if five persons were sitting at a table, and each were to register a separate

emotion which you wished to convey clearly to the audience and leave it impressed upon their minds, you could not do it very well by showing them seated at a table which was located quite a ways back into a scene. To show five close-ups in succession would also be confusing, so you would simply call for a "panoram scene" and have the camera move from one to the other at the table without a break in the scene.

The same style is used in many outdoor pictures to photograph long stretches in the open. It can also be applied to interiors where two or three rooms compose the set, and where varied action is going on in each at the same time.

#### WRITER TO WRITER.

J. G. Alexander, an Allentown, Pennsylvania, playwright, sends us a most interesting communication, in which our readers will doubtless be interested. He speaks as writer to writer, and his words are worthy of attention. His letter reads as follows:

"In writing for the photo play, the most needed requisite is imagination, both in the creative sense, to evolve original plots, and the concrete sense, to see the plots which are worked out on the screen before our eyes. In other words, the photo-playwright must be able to clearly visualize every portion of the action in a play which he works out in his own mind, or which he sees on the screen. We must watch our characters, and see them performing before our eyes. Then we must study, and know just why they do the things they do, and how they

could do them more effectively. We must also know how to strike a balance in our story so that the continuity and sequence of the action is preserved throughout. With many plot threads to work with, this is very difficult, and requires time and thought. We must remember that plot is a conflict of human wills which at its culmination brings about some change in the relations of the characters involved in the conflict.

“Is there such a thing as genius? There is, but it is inherent, and only a spark. That spark must be fanned into a flame. A person may strive and toil at a life work, but he cannot attain the height of success unless there is an adaptitude for the work which allows his whole heart and soul to be in the task. Genius is really latent energy, and energy is the ability to do work. Therefore, to bring genius to a practical agent, work must be performed. Genius is potential as a force, but study and hard work must be performed before genius becomes kinetic and by its own force performs work. Therefore, as we see by the foregoing, while it is a great thing to possess adaptitude or genius for a life work, nevertheless study and hard work, which will lead us through the realm of experience, are necessary in order that genius be recognized.”

#### FRUITS OF EXPERIENCE.

Another letter from Mr. Alexander gives us some of the conclusions he has drawn from his own experiences, and they are so good we pass them on to our readers. Here they are:

"The construction of the photo play has many elements that enter into the drama of the stage, except that there is no dialogue and everything is *action*. Just as in the spoken drama, dialogue must be compulsory and not story, just because the author wishes to impart something to his audience, so in the photo play the use of leaders is like the use of story in the drama. Leaders should not be used except where it is impossible to register clearly the action to an audience. A properly constructed play, with a real plot, will need very few leaders. Of course some are necessary, but remember that just as they break up the continuity of action in the picture, so will they also have a tendency to break up the spectator's continuity of thought. Therefore try to make leaders word pictures, so that the cut-ins will be part of the scenes themselves, and will not jar the psychological side of the audience. Where time leaders are used, make them convey a picture to the mind. For example: In a recent picture, action was transpiring in a desert location. The author wished to jump to night on the same location, a time leader was necessary, the one used being 'That night.' It jarred. How much better if the following leader had been used: 'Night covers the desert.' It conveys a graphic picture to our minds. We are still on the desert; as in previous scene, we see night descend over scene, and our minds are ready and receptive for the next scene. Again, the extra words require practically no more footage. If leaders are necessary to a clear understanding, use them, for at all times the audience

must have a clear idea of the picture; but don't slam them in to break up. If the plot is strong enough and developed right, the leaders will inject themselves naturally; but make them graphic, in keeping with the personality of the characters and play, if cut-ins, and word pictures conveying pictures of lapses of time if time or break leaders.

"Continuity, that factor which holds the interest, and the lack of which destroys same, should be watched closely. Don't lose your characters; and finally, when the audience, being absorbed in the action of the present, has forgotten them, jump back abruptly to where you left them. Give every scene a logical reason in sequence to the scene previous, and remember the audience are not writing with you, and the characters are not planted in their brains as in yours; they only have the screen to go by. Also don't insult an audience's intelligence by making a character appear in a dense forest in a hunter's uniform and in the next scene in his club, dressed immaculately and sipping an iced drink, oblivious to the charms of nature except as regards the mint leaves in his glass. Make the action logical, give him a reason for being in each place and, as he hasn't 'seven-league boots' nor an electric valet in the woods, give him a chance to get from place to place and dressed.

"In writing a photo play, keep this motto tacked to your eye shade: *It must at all times entertain.*

"When finally the script is finished, sit down and pick out a square on the wall. Visualize the entire play in it,



try to see your characters acting the drama, imagining you are looking at the screen. Breaks in continuity can be picked out, if you see properly, and you will see your brain child as others will see it—maybe. You can at least give it the best self-criticism possible, as by merely reading, breaks, lack of plot, and interest will escape you; but with a clear visualization and strong imagination you will probably arrive at a conclusion, whether it is worthy postage or not—that is, if you are honest with yourself.

“Put your *own* work in the script, not the gleanings from others. If you don’t care to work, and work hard, don’t try to write.

“Try to put your individual personality and imagination into your work; if you succeed, it will give it fresh color. If you have not a strong imagination, don’t write; save the energy for things that will benefit you. Suppose you thought that writing music was a money getter, and you didn’t know a note, and were not gifted musically—would you compose music and expect it to be accepted?

“Be fair to yourself. If you have not the writer’s adaptability toward writing, why try? It will only get editors sore, and show you up. Even for a person who *can* write, it takes hard work, stick-to-itiveness, perseverance, and study. For one not adapted, it takes a miracle, and the age of miracles is past.”

#### INSPIRING GOOD FEELING.

A letter was recently sent to us by a photo-playwright in New York City who has been fairly successful for some time past, but who has not as yet broken into the

rank and file of professional writers. It tells the story of an editor who is inspiring good feeling between himself and his contributors. We congratulate the editor mentioned, and publish the writer's letter to us herewith, as we think it is a good object lesson to other editors and writers:

"A short time ago I submitted a scenario to Russell Smith, editor of the Famous Players Film Company, of New York. It was quickly returned, with a rejection slip, which read: 'Not big enough for us.' I realized that when it was too late, and was not surprised at its return. At another time I sent Mr. Smith another offering, and this, too, was returned. Again the rejection slip was marked, this time reading: 'Not our line; try ——,' giving the names of several companies he knew to be handling that line. Doesn't that prove conclusively that my scenario was given personal attention and carefully read? I think so, at least, and I want to thank Mr. Smith and the Famous Players Company for their kind suggestions. Even though the scenarios in question do not sell I shall always appreciate their efforts to help me, and I want my brother writers to know that if their ideas are big enough this company will not turn them down simply because they are newcomers. I shall seek no farther for honest men."

FROM A MAN WHO KNOWS.

Not so very long ago a stranger came to the World Film Corporation's studios in New Jersey to make pictures. His name did not make much difference at that

time, for no one knew him, anyway. Now it does, however, for every one who has followed the motion-picture industry closely knows that M. Maurice Tourneur has been making "pictures," with emphasis on the last word. In a recent interview granted a representative of a New York paper, he expressed his views of the present situation in the motion-picture world. We present them herewith for the benefit of our readers:

"Big stars from the speaking stage," he said, "are all right for the photo play. I have no fault to find with them. They have done a big service for the moving pictures. They have made it possible for us to lift ourselves out of the nickelodeon or small-store shows. They have lent tone to the screen. They have won, through the importance of their names and the attendant advertising possible with it, the consideration for the film drama from the intelligent class of people, who otherwise would not have regarded it seriously. No two-dollar picture show would ever have been possible as a success but for the previous presence of these stars of the two-dollar speaking stage on the screen.

"But the big call of the moving picture of to-day in its anxiety for the future must be for manuscripts. We have in the moving picture a new way of expressing our thoughts; therefore let us have new ideas to express as well. Let us not put on the same old stuff cloaked in a slightly altered garment. I am glad that I believe that the adaptation of books and stage plays is only temporary, as it is at present a necessary evil. Our film stories must

be written especially for the screen and with the possibilities of the camera always in the author's mind.

"We must find a way—and there is only one way—to attract the most talented authors to the scenario field. If we offer enough money we will command their attention. And they will take the time to learn to realize the numberless possibilities of the screen and specialize in that direction.

"The so-called scenario writer of to-day, with but few exceptions, is a back number, or should be one. He is a relic of a bygone day, with an entirely different demand, who has not kept abreast of the times and does not realize the changed conditions. Indeed, if he had, I doubt if he would have known how to meet them. He is of an inferior order of intelligence. He is a small peg in a large hole, and does not fit it at all and cannot be made to. Far better would it be to find a peg which was too big and cut it down to the proper dimensions.

"The scenario writer of to-day has the same old bag of tricks, and uses the five-and-ten-cent-store method of shaking it up and grabbing the tricks, giving them perhaps a different order of appearance, but, alas! they are the same old tricks. How tired we become of them!

"Now let us rid ourselves once and for all time of the old court-trial scenes, the mobs of policemen, the awful poison stuff, the tons of guns and knives, the asinine detective horseplay, with the colossal magnifying reading glass, which he produces from an inside pocket and peers stupidly through at furniture and carpet. And—oh, yes!

Let us not forget to lose forever that time-honored locket by which, years afterward, the kidnaped child is recognized through a picture of its sainted mother. Shades of 'The Bohemian Girl'! You were new once. And, please, Mister Scenario Writer, forget that troop of soldiers galloping up with a flag to rescue the hero when you can find no other way to end the picture!

"Really, when I see some of this stuff on the screen, I can only shut my eyes and clench my hands in mental agony. It reminds me of a very early picture in the first moments of motion pictures which I found mentioned in an ancient catalogue the other day. It read: 'Twenty-five feet—Arrival of a train in a station—Full of movement—Very interesting.'

"The time is past when we were satisfied with movement alone. Now we want action. We must not confuse action and foolishness any more than we must mistake melodrama for drama. What is the sense in paying huge salaries to excellent actors just to make them jump through windows, chase over rocky roads, through dense underbrush, or across muddy streams? If this must be done, it is work for 'extra people' or 'supers.' Let us have scripts with the real actors acting with their brains, not with their legs.

"Now a word as to the so-called scenario department—a really crying evil and the main obstacle in the path of the arrival of the big author who will bring the photo play into its own and who alone can do it. I do not be-



lieve anything really good could possibly be turned out in one of these machine shops masquerading under the misnomer of scenario departments. A picture story is not like a suit of clothes—to be made to order. First, there must be voluntary inspiration; then thought, a lot of thought. The author must eat, sleep, drink—whatever he does—with that idea. In a word, he must live with it. Sometimes he must be two months worrying it, and, of course, to get this amount of time and thought from the right sort of literary brains, we must offer the right sort of compensation. If one of the poor hacks in any of the scenario shops I know were to spend that amount of his poorly paid time with an idea he would be fired instantler. He surely could not go beyond the beginning of the second week.

“When in the world, for instance, may we be permitted to finish a story in the logical way if the unhappy way, perchance, should be the logical way? Never until we recognize the importance of the author, which is secondary to no other factor in the picture. It is only a few years since that revolution was accomplished on the speaking stage. ‘Trilby’ is a notable instance. The audience should be educated gradually up to the point where it will not always demand a picture in which the last word is, like the tale of the lovesick candles, ‘They married in peace, died in grease, and are burned on the mantelpiece.’ Frequently a fine story is either absolutely spoiled or at least rendered innocuous by this silly superstition against ending it in the logical way.”

## THE UNDERLYING IDEA.

When a play especially impresses you, it will pay you to study it carefully and see what it is that makes you like it, for in that way you will probably discover something beneficial in your future writings. All experienced writers know the value of the underlying idea—a human motive—which gives the finished work the power to impress its truth upon the average mind. Once the truth is impressed, the work is not easily forgotten.

As a concrete example of what we mean, we might cite a detective story we recently saw on the screen. The action was fast, and bordered on the melodramatic in places, and that seemed all there was to it on the surface. But it stuck in our mind, and we analyzed it. In doing so, we discovered that the point which we had really been impressed by was the conduct of a manly man toward his weakling brother. It was a simile of life. In large families, where there is a weakling brother, there generally is a stronger one who assumes charge of the weakling and tries to make a man of him. This is where the plot revolving around a strong brother's sacrifice for a weaker one originated, but this has been overdone, and has lost its value.

The brothers in this case figured prominently in the action, but at none of the crises, or at the climax, did the older brother do anything heroic to help the weakling. All the way through, however, the author had consistently seen to it that he watched and guarded his weakling brother's steps. His care of him was obviously the

underlying idea of the story, but the material had been so arranged that it was completely covered up with more interesting action.

All plots should have a sort of a backbone of this kind, and the more securely it is hidden the harder it will drive home its point, for it will force all who see it to remember and think about it long after they have left the theater.

#### THE STATUS OF THE FILM "GAME."

There are many amateurs who see pictures on the screen regularly, and who learn much about each company's products, but who are ignorant as to which of film-land's combinations the company belongs. This is a regretful condition, for, while successful scenarios may be written without any knowledge at all of the selling end of the game, the writer who knows it always has the advantage over the one who is in the dark. For the benefit of our readers who are not "in the know" about this matter we will give a short outline of the various releasing groups into which the various companies are divided at the present time.

The General Film Company is the oldest of the program-distributing concerns and is composed of most of the old companies who were in the game at the very beginning. Biograph, Lubin, Vitagraph, Selig, Kleine, Essanay, Kalem, MinA, Edison, and Knickerbocker are the brands which appear in this service. All are made by companies bearing the brand name except MinA and Knickerbocker, which are turned out by Melies. One,

two, and three-reelers are the bill on this program, four reels being the highest mark ever reached.

The V. L. S. E., Incorporated, combination is supplied by four companies which are also making films for General, viz., Vitagraph, Lubin, Selig, and Essanay. This program is made up solely of features five reels or more in length. The four companies alternate in supplying a feature per week, making an average of about one feature a month for each. There are also special releases of features during each month, and there is talk of the program becoming much larger in the near future.

The Mutual Film Corporation recently underwent a big change, as the Ince, Griffith, and Sennett pictures were withdrawn and others had to be secured to take their places. At present the brands which are distributed through Mutual are American, Thanhouser, Falstaff, Gaumont, Beauty, Centaur, Cub, Novelty, Rialto, Clipper, Mustang, Reliance, Than-o-Play, and others which have not as yet been announced. The American Film Manufacturing Company, the Thanhouser Company, the David Horsley Centaur forces, and the Gaumont Company are the producing concerns behind this company. Its program is made up of one, two, and three-reelers, with a Mutual masterpicture of more than three reels every week.

The Triangle Corporation is made up of Fine Arts Films, produced by David W. Griffith; New York Motion Pictures films, produced by Thomas Ince, and Keystone comedies, directed by Mack Sennett. These films

were formerly released on the Mutual program under the brand names of Reliance, Majestic, Komic, Domino, Kay Bee, Broncho, and Keystone, though they were not so pretentious at that time. They are now turned out in weekly lots of two five-reelers and two two-reelers, the former pair being dramas by Ince and Griffith, and the latter two being comedies by Sennett.

The World Film Corporation is made up of several feature companies who make five-reelers and release them at the rate of one every week. Among these companies are Equitable, Peerless, Shubert, Brady, World Comedy, California Moving Picture Corporation, and many others who produce pictures irregularly.

The Paramount Corporation is one of the oldest film-distributing mediums in the feature game. Its companies are the Famous Players' Film Company, the Lasky Company, the Bosworth & Oliver Morosco Company, and the Dallas Pictures Corporation. Like World, it releases five-reel pictures, but gives the public two a week instead of one.

Kleine-Edison, Pathé, and Metro are other releasing combines which have gained recognition, the first and the last of this trio turning out one five-reeler per week, and Pathé handling what will probably be in time a complete program of everything from one to five-reelers.

Other combinations come and go with regularity that is amazing. They do not amount to a great deal and should not interest writers to any great extent. All the programs and companies mentioned above are going



nicely at the present time, and should continue in the game for some time. Numerous changes are undoubtedly due to take place in the motion-picture world before long, but the companies we have mentioned are all able to hold their own, and, despite the way matters shape up in the future, these companies will be found near the top.

We would advise all our readers to keep this list and also to keep in touch with the game in the future so that they will be able to know what we mean when we say that scripts should only be sent to the companies having a releasing outlet. It is this outlet that brings the money to a producing company, for without it the company is helpless—it has films, but no practical means of getting them before the public other than by the precarious way of “States’ rights.”

#### INCE’S IDEAS OF THE INDUSTRY.

The views of Thomas H. Ince, director general of the New York Motion Pictures forces of the Triangle Film Corporation, on the motion-picture industry should be of no little importance to writers, for they are the views of a man who has climbed to the very top of the motion-picture ladder in a few short years. Beginners and more experienced writers alike will do well to weigh carefully all that Mr. Ince says in the following article, which was taken from a speech he made recently at the national convention of motion-picture exhibitors. Following are some of his remarks:

“I have said that the one and two-reel films will never

lack for a market, that they will never have to go begging for a theater, and that they will never have to fight for popularity. Why? you ask. Because motion pictures, in a measure, may be compared with the so-called legitimate theatrical productions, as the latter were some years ago. The feature pictures take the same rank, when coupled with the single-reel or two-reel film, as the four or five-act play of the footlight realm does, or did, when coupled with the vaudeville program.

"There are those among the amusement-seeking people of the world who can afford but a few spare moments for their entertainment. They must go where there is such entertainment as will have a start and finish. They are not content to pay admission to a theater playing a four or five-act play, when they have but a half hour in which to seek pleasurable diversion. Ergo, the necessity of the variety house, where an act lasts from ten minutes to a half hour.

"This identical situation obtains in respect to pictures. Let me give you an illustration: I happened to be on Broadway, in Los Angeles, one day not long ago, when two salesgirls from one of the department stores approached. Obviously they were intent on spending their noon recess from their work by attending a motion-picture show. One house was exhibiting a five-reel picture. Another theater, immediately adjoining, was advertising two single-reel films and the same number of two-reel productions. The girls started for the feature house. They had scarcely observed the fact that a five-

reel subject was the program, when they stopped, turned about, and entered the other theater. 'We only have twenty minutes,' I heard one say as she passed me, 'and you know it would be awfully disappointing to have to get up and leave after seeing only one reel. In this place we will, at least, have time to see a complete picture.'

"That little incident in itself is adamant proof, I think, that the smaller film production will never have to hunt for a market. Therefore, because it will never have to hunt for a market, it will never have to fight for popularity nor beg for a theater.

"There has been much discussion, pro and con, of late over the prospect of 'two-dollar movies,' and the question propounded appears to be, 'Will the public fall for them?' or words to that effect. The fact that the public is eager to spend two dollars a seat to see a film production had been demonstrated. And I feel that there will be no difficulty in demonstrating that the public will continue to spend two dollars a seat to witness drama on the screen.

"It will require time and expenditures of fortunes. But it can and will be done. It will take time to make perfect photo productions, and money, as well. And only perfect productions can possibly convince the public, as a whole, that the sum of two dollars is worth spending for an afternoon or evening's entertainment.

"To this end, it is essential that we provide picture plays, such as have never before been provided regu-

larly. In my opinion, there have been perfect photo plays. But they have been comparatively very few. They have lacked the 'two-dollar' aspect. They, on the whole, have been unworthy of presentation to the public as a full afternoon or evening's entertainment. And it is that element of worthiness that we must impart to our future features if we are to expect them to command theatrical prices.

"One of the strongest arguments in support of my contention that the feature production is but in its infancy and that it rapidly is progressing to a position that will surpass our greatest 'legitimate' productions is the fact that the most illustrious stars are recognizing the importance of the films. True, they are expensive, but I have stated that money must be spent, and pay rolls constitute a part of the expenditures.

"For years and years the public has been paying handsome admission prices to see this or that notable actor or actress on the stage. The world has virtually admitted that the possibilities of the camera—of the studio—are vastly greater than the stage. Then why should the world hesitate about offering the same amount of money to see the same stars on the screen?

"I am a firm believer in the magnetism—the commercial value—of a prominent actor or actress in motion pictures. I am so staunch a believer in that doctrine that every one of the pictures I am making now and intend to make will have a celebrated artist at the head of its cast. And I do not believe that a star only has a com-

mercial value; he has an artistic value to pictures as well. For, what of his artistry found no medium of manifestation on the stage is bound to find it in the studio. The limitless powers of the camera will seek out and give expression to his pantomimic abilities, and thus will the drama, on the screen, be elevated to heights that have never been attained by that on the stage.

"In producing 'The Alien,' adapted from 'The Sign of the Rose,' in which Mr. George Beban worked under my direction, I found these things to be true. I had long been an admirer of Mr. Beban's character delineations on the speaking stage. And yet, until I saw and observed the very lines in his face, as his emotions dictated their formation—when I saw them on the screen—I never had accorded him the credit that was due.

"This, I contend, is applicable also to other wonderful artists of the drama, and time will show if I am correct.

"In conclusion, I might sum up my brief remarks by again emphasizing my prediction that the feature photo drama is only just coming into its own; that another year will see it packing theaters with people who will think nothing of paying heretofore unheard-of prices; that achievements now almost unbelievable will have been accomplished, and that instead of having but a few masterpieces a year, we'll have one every few weeks.

"The motion-picture industry knows no bounds. That is a statement frequently made, but it cannot be too sincerely repeated. It is not in its infancy, but is still



going to school, and it will not have reached its maturity until my prophecies have been borne out."

#### CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

An Eastern photo-playwright writes interestingly about his experiences in working out the destinies of his characters. He is a firm believer in the theory that a writer gets the best out of his plot when he places himself in the positions each of his characters are placed, and then does what seems to be the natural thing to do. Anent this matter, he says: "In writing the action of the play, the scenarioist should try to transform himself into each of the characters as they go through the plot action. It will help make the character natural if the writer will see that everything they do is the most logical thing possible, and will also save the writer many rejections by making all his action plausible. I always like to imagine myself in all my characters' positions, and then make them do just what I would do if I were placed in such a position in real life."

We think this idea a very excellent one, and know many writers who have put it to practical use and found it successful. By forcing yourself to regard each of your characters as a real person and investing each with your own personality and judgment, you make the entire play seem more real. Then, too, the close study of the character's actions often leads to the finding of unlimited possibilities in the theme the writer has selected, and may cause him to add something which will prove the "punch" of the play.

## A TWO-SIDED STORY.

Recently a scenario writer sent the author a letter in which he complained that a certain company had returned a script he had sent them without opening it, because, through an oversight, he had mailed it two cents shy of postage. He had a few sarcastic remarks to make about the company, among which was the statement that if "they didn't consider a script worth two cents, he would see that they didn't get any more of his."

A few days later another letter arrived from an editor friend, who also had a grievance. He complained that the average scenario writer must think the film companies are being operated for the benefit of Uncle Sam, as about one out of every twenty scenarios that were submitted were short of postage when they arrived. He said that his concern had always paid the amount due, but that because of the number of scripts coming that way now they were going to shut down on it and refuse to accept them.

Our readers can see both sides of the fence after reading both the above paragraphs, and we think they will agree with us that the author was right in his own way, but the editor was even more right in his. No film company will return a scenario because they do not consider it worth two or four cents. Far from that! They would gladly pay a thousand times that amount for a real live-wire script. The thing they do get tired of, however, is paying due postage for worthless scenarios from beginners, who do not know the first

thing about the work. When an army of these "postage-due" scripts arrive every day, it is small wonder they are returned. Every writer may insure himself against having a script sent back in this way by placing enough postage on it to carry it to its destination. A pair of scales on the desk is ever so much better than guess-work.

#### ONE WRITER'S VIEWPOINT.

In response to our request that he send us his viewpoint on scenario writing in general, James M. Douglas, a Stamford, Conn., photo-playwright, sends us the following comments:

"The first thing I will take up is the difficulty in handling my first script. To tell the real truth, I hadn't any except the extraordinary experience of having seen the same theme on the screen about a week after the script had been sent out by me. The details of the plot were worked out a little differently, of course, but the main features were so like my own that I knew it would have no chance in the world of acceptance, and, even if it had, I didn't want it, because editors might think I had copied, and therefore do me harm, so I decided to 'pigeonhole it' as the best thing to do.

"I must say that my experiences with the film companies so far had been entirely satisfactory. Some companies have been good enough to say that they are running special features, and to try other companies. Another will say that there are companies looking for just

such a plot as I have sent, but which they were not running themselves at present.

"About the writing of a script: I take particular pains with each one I send out, often writing each one over three or four times before it passes muster; for, after all, a man who has seen plays on the screen is, or should be, one of the best judges of his own work, and should ask himself: Now, would you be satisfied with that if you saw it on the screen? So, unless I can say of each script, as it would appear on the screen, It was not half bad, or, It was all right, it does not leave my hands.

"Of course, we all know that editors make mistakes. They occasionally pass a script that should have been condemned at the start, and reject those that are good. They are only human, and try to make their mistakes as few as possible. At the same time, I hope that when an editor O. K.'s my work he will have on his best thinking cap and accept it for its true worth.

"I don't think the technique of a photo play need bother an amateur. The excellent example given in one of your issues ought to be sufficient for any one to master that part of it. The main thing, to my mind, is the plot, and, secondly, continuity of action. I try to have every scene fit into the other without the least break, because I know what it is to sit out a picture and wonder at the end what it was all about. I also underline all leaders in red ink and make them as strong as possible to catch the eye of the editors."

## PATIENCE.

A short time ago we were talking to a writer who has become noted for the number of sales he registers monthly. In the course of the conversation we asked him how long it took him to get a start in the game. "About three years," he replied. "I sold two plays during my first two years." That was all we said on that subject; but his plain statement left an impression on our mind, for at another time this writer had showed us his file of rejected scripts, and, when we remarked about their number, he said that since he began writing scenarios he had never let a week pass without turning out at least one reel.

The two facts told us the story of patience. During those first two years he had worked along steadily, turning out at least one reel per week, and yet he had sold only two scenarios. That record surely is enough to make the average writer discouraged, but this fellow kept on plugging. He knew he had the ideas, and that he had long since acquired the correct technique. No amount of rejections could do other than help him to turn out better work, and the result was that he has succeeded, with a capital S.

It is an excellent example for any young writers. Patience is one of the important elements in the climb of an author to the top of the ladder. He must work—and wait. One without the other cannot accomplish the desired end.

Every scenarioist should learn the lesson of patience.



He should be willing to keep on working week in and week out without any apparent reward for an indefinite length of time, if he feels he is learning things daily, and if he is convinced that in the end success will come to him. Of course, there must be some sort of daily labor during this period to supply the necessities of life, and his best efforts should be lent to this while he is employed by it. The grind is a tedious one, and wears many down before they have gone far, but the victory for those who fight to the top is so much sweeter because of the effort.

#### DEATH SCENES.

A film recently issued by one of the big companies started with a death scene which ran about five hundred feet. It created an atmosphere of depression at the very beginning, and though the latter part of the picture was very acceptable, the whole left a "heavy" feeling with the majority of the audience, many of whom expressed their opinion to the manager of the house as they passed out.

A long time ago the better class of directors started to cut down the prominence of death scenes, and they certainly have succeeded in reducing the number of plays containing these during the past two years. Now and then, however, one sneaks onto the screen, and it is ever so much more noticeable because of the scarcity of others of its kind. It is possible to put on an artistic death scene in motion pictures, but in few instances is such a scene of importance enough to warrant the

footage an artistic producer would use in handling it. The best thing for scenario writers—especially beginners, who have not yet learned to appreciate the artistic worth of a play—to do, is to entirely eliminate death from their scripts. This will insure them against the prejudice of editors who are opposed to such scenes, and will also protect them from criticism if a script should be produced and the death scene played up in a sensational way.

A PLEA FOR THE MEXICANS.

Phil H. LeNoir, the man who put Las Vegas, New Mexico, on the motion-picture map, and who turns out good scenarios regularly, has sent us a plea for the Mexicans. There are a number of them in this country, and he should know whereof he speaks. Photo-playwrights who aspire to write Western dramas, but who do not know the country, should read his remarks carefully. Here they are:

“I was born, bred, and brought up in the élite East—the élitest East, if you please. Then Old Man Circumstance picked me up and transplanted me in New Mexico. Now, Friend Contentment keeps me, and always will keep me, here. Since living in the West, I have received many an enlightening jolt, one of which I will pass on. While talking to one of our native—Mexican—citizens, a man of education and culture, he said, knowing of my interest in the writing game: ‘Why is it that in ninety per cent of the books and photo plays I read and see of Western stories, the villain is one of my people?’

Surely, authors and playwrights can't think that we all are such a bad lot? Do you ever remember seeing a Mexican as a hero in a story?

"I replied that I hadn't given the matter much thought, but that I would. So, Diogeneslike, I went looking for a play wherein a Mexican was cast, and in which he was not the heavy, and also for one in which a Mexican was cast for a lead. Up to this time I have been unsuccessful in my quest. And so I ask the question of our authors: Why pick on the Mexican all the time for your heavy? If they could live out here as I do, and mix in with these people, know of their upright lives, their humbleness, their sacrifices, their high ideals, and their absolute harmlessness—their apartness from the villainous—I am sure they would be less willing to garb them with the clothes of crime. Hardly a story—a Western story—is flashed on the screen but what we see the besombreroed head of a dark-skinned individual peek from behind a bush, and, because we've been so taught, we think of that character, until the finish of the picture, not as the 'villain,' but as the 'Mexican.'

"I reported back to my Mexican friend, and, while conversing with him, pointing to an old, dilapidated fellow, he said: 'There, look across the street at that man. He is the son of a don. In his prime he owned what we now would consider an empire. But he was too honest, too upright, and—then, one day, the American came along, and should you dig deep into the life of that man you see, and the man who stole from him his very

life, I wonder if you had to cast them both in a play, which one would carry the villain part, and which the hero?"

"True, the above incident could, and does, occur in our own American life, but it illustrates the point that the Mexican should not be the bad man for all time to come.

"I make this plea for our native folks. I believe they are much maligned and misunderstood, and that the author is in a large measure responsible for this. And then, I am wondering, from a dollar-and-cents viewpoint, how a series, or a number of one and two-reel stories, in which the Mexican is cast as lead, or of Mexican life alone, with all the characters human and really life-like, would show up in the cash till of the exhibitor doing business in the communities where a large number of Mexican people live?"

#### ON KEEPING STORE.

If a man starts to keep a stationery and supply store, he doesn't put in one kind of tablets, one kind of pencils, one kind of ink, one kind of wrapping paper, and one kind of everything else he expects to sell. He gets several kinds of each, and then, when one kind does not register the sale he wishes to make, he offers another kind. That is only good business, and the storekeeper does not think he is doing anything at all exceptional by thinking of it.

But a scenario writer who is breaking into the game doesn't always have the same viewpoint. He never

thinks of storing up several kinds of ideas that he will be able to use later. He starts to "sell" right away, and if his material that is offered first fails to sell, he cannot offer something different which may serve the purpose. That is poor business, but the writer does not realize this, and wonders why he is a failure instead of a success.

Moral: Broaden your mind with a large stock of ideas, so you may draw them as needed, and so you will never be caught without something salable to offer.

#### DEVELOPING THE CRISES.

Where a plot has several crises, much of its success will depend on how these crises are led up to and disposed of. If they are all covered up with suspense, and their ending gives rise to the next situation gracefully, the effect of the entire story will, indeed, be pleasing. But if they are poorly handled, there is little use of writing the scenario proper, for the interest will not be well sustained.

The art of developing a crisis is too great for rules. It must be controlled by the writer himself, and he alone can handle his situation effectively. He must understand just how to proportion it, so that there is neither too little nor too much suspense before the climax of the crises occurs; he must know how to lead naturally from one crisis into another in such a manner that the art is concealed. The beginner asks where the writer may learn this, and we can do no better than say, "by studying the screen!"



## THE BIG THEME.

The present war has probably inspired more beginners to try their hand at big themes—those whose ideas are the ideas which concern millions of people—than anything else in the history of the game. The beginner learns of some important international question, and at once sees a possibility in it. He weaves a plot about it, and, in his own way, settles the matter. His way of settling it, however, would probably be quite different from the way a statesman would handle it, and, if we may say so, would not be quite as logical because of his distant position from the question proper.

No film company cares to consider anything along these lines from the free lance at the present time. It is true that one of the big manufacturing concerns, recently completed a film dealing with the advisability of this country preparing for war during times of peace, but the idea originated in the mind of one of the owners of the concern—a man big enough to treat such a subject with authority, and he personally constructed the scenario.

The amateur must try for a theme that is big enough to hold attention, for trite ones will not make for sales, but he must also realize just how big a theme he is capable of developing, and make his selection accordingly. If he gets one just the right size for him, he will find it much easier to work out, and, on his next attempt, he can undertake a little larger one.

## CONSIDER THE PLAYERS.

There is a limit to the sharpness of any player's expression, no matter how much of an artist he or she may be, and the author must realize this in writing his scripts. We have seen certain scenes in which a player would have to be a wizard to "get over" the expression the author called for. Not that the expression itself was so difficult, but the action called the player to a position in the scene where he would not easily be noticed. Of course, a good director would remedy this weakness, but there is no reason why the script writer should not attend to it himself at the very beginning. There are other examples of where the author did not consider the limited possibilities of the players, noticeably in close-range scenes. Often in a finished production you will see a close-up scene which does not carry any idea to you, and which, therefore, seems superfluous to the picture. In such a case you may be sure that the writer had some idea to carry, but overestimated the ability of the player and director and made the effect so subtle that they failed to "put it over" successfully.

## THE INDUSTRIAL FIELD.

There is a little-known field which a few experienced writers have cornered all by themselves and which they bid fair to keep, because it seems to be theirs by right of discovery. It is the industrial field. An industrial picture is one that is made for advertising purposes. It requires the services of a photo-playwright in making only if the advertising facts it contains are to be sugar-

coated with a little story. In case an author is assigned to write a story of this kind, he must manufacture his idea to fit the product about which he is going to write, and must then make his action as interesting as possible, seeing that it all revolves about the commodity which he is helping advertise. It is, without a doubt, the hardest story to write if it is to be made interesting. William Lord Wright, photo-playwright department writer for the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, was one of the pioneers in this field, and, with a few more old-timers in the game, does most of the work of this kind on the market.

#### THE MAN WHO ADOPTS FEATURES.

Under the title of "The Six Best Sellers on the Screen," an article appeared in a recent issue of *Motography*, by Harvey Gates, which tore the mask off certain prevailing conditions in the film game. It tells certain facts about the adapting of well-known works of literature which have not been exposed before, and which should prove highly interesting to all writers, both new and old. The article, in full, follows:

A free-lance scenario writer whose name is practically unknown to the theatergoing public, recently applied for a position on the scenario staff of a well-known film company. The editor had seen his work and liked it, so he was hired. On his first day as a staff man, the scenario editor called him into the office.

"Mr. Blank," he said, "have you ever read So-and-so's work, called——" here he mentioned the name of a popular novel of a few years ago.

"Yes, I have," answered Mr. Blank.

"Well, take this copy and see if you can work up a four-reel feature from it."

Mr. Blank took the book, looked at it a moment, and asked: "Have you read it?"

"Yes," returned the editor. "Why?"

"What do you think of it?"

"Well," was the noncommittal reply, "it's got a pretty good punch. Of course, there are too many lapses of time and the characters jump around a good deal. Personally, I think there are too many characters to begin with. And perhaps the main part of the action should be shifted to this country. It's almost impossible to get that foreign atmosphere."

"Then what's the idea of attempting to revamp it? Why not let me write an original feature?"

"Well, you see, the company has bought the rights to the book and wants to stage it. I think you can swing it around so it will make a story."

So Mr. Blank took the book, and the next day he returned with a synopsis, not of the novel, but of a story which the novel had suggested to him, almost an entirely new theme, but one which would be released under the name of the novel's author.

Now, for the rights to use the book, the film company had paid a real price. And what did it get? True, it had a title, but that was about all. For it had paid regular money for the book and it had then paid a

staff man to do—what? Scenarioize it? Oh, no. It had paid him to make a story of it.

Do not think this an isolated case. Far from it. I have known—and so has every scenario writer in the game—of instances where books had proved so utterly impossible for screen production that officials have authorized throwing away the entire story and building up another, to be shown under the title of the original.

All of which brings up the question: Why?

It is a question which scenario writers have been asking for a long, long time, and the only answer they get is: "The use of the author's name is worth something."

Let us grant that "it is worth something," but let's make it a little more definite. How much is it worth? How many of the "men in the street" know the average author of fiction? Ask some of your up-to-date business acquaintances what some well-known author has written. Oh, better still, name a book and ask him who wrote it. Ten to one he can't answer you. And yet the author of that book will get a big bonus for the use of his name, a name which means nothing to nine out of every ten.

Being in the scenario game, the writer may be accused of being prejudiced. Let us see if he is.

While we are in the mood, let's look among our best authors, and, from their works, choose the best short story and see what it would look like, robbed of its



literary "style" and reduced to a mere matter of plot. Try it, and the chances are that you will get, in the language of the street, "a piece of cheese." Don't misunderstand me. This is not an attempt to discredit the short story; I am speaking of it and its plot value from the standpoint of the screen.

Suppose we take the works of the man who is generally regarded as America's best short-story writer, O. Henry. Now, what is his best work? Opinions differ, of course, but popular fancy has chosen "The Third Ingredient." Fair enough. Now, suppose we rob it of the style of telling which made O. Henry a genius without peer; a style which made him a teller of stories whose works will live indefinitely? Strip it of this; reduce it to mere plot, for that is what we must consider in the picture business, and what remains? Something which would read about like this:

A despondent girl, crossing the bay on a ferryboat, decides to commit suicide. She jumps over the side of the boat, but is rescued by a wealthy young man who is watching her. (They call such situations trite in the film game.) Turning her over to a taxi driver, the young man hurries home without having learned her address, which he, of course, regrets. The following day the girl finds that she has only two potatoes for lunch. As she is washing them at the community sink, another tenant, of the same tenement, approaches the sink with her dinner, a piece of beef. They decide to combine their provisions and make a stew. The girl enters the room and

is lighting the fire while her friend continues to prepare the food at the sink. Along comes a young man, eating an onion. The friend insists that they put it in the stew. The young man consents, and, as he enters the room where the girl is busy with the fire, he recognizes the suicide girl, and they come to a clinch. It is presumed that they are married later.

We know that to be one of the best short stories ever written in the English language, but read over the meager outline carefully and say whether or not it would make a picture. Let us suppose it would. Let us, for the sake of argument, go a step further and say that it has been made into an exceptionally interesting one-reel film. Granted that this is the case, whose is the credit? Who deserves the praise for the little touches that create the heart interest? Who, indeed, but the scenario writer?

From the mere plot, as outlined above, O. Henry, through his knowledge of the technique of the short story, was able to construct what may be called his best tale. From the same meager plot—for O. Henry's clever style could help him not at all—the scenario writer, through his knowledge of the technique, has been able to construct an unusual one-reeler. But just as the touches that make the printed story a marvel are O. Henry's, so are the touches that raise the film story from the mediocre the scenario writer's. For the mere plot of a story is no more a film masterpiece than it is a short-story masterpiece.

Popular opinion to-day seems to insist that the writer of fiction must of necessity be able to write for film production.

I insist that, all other things being equal, the trained scenario writer, the man who has made it a study, the man who has worked and perspired trying to master its technique, trying to understand just what effects result in a good screen story, and how to get those effects, can write a better scenario, or even the synopsis of one, than the best writer of fiction alive to-day who has not made a similar study.

Why should he not? Does it not stand to reason?

Here we have two men of the same age. Both, for the sake of argument, have approximately the same brain power. Both have seen about the same phases of life. One of these men, striving as most of us are doing, for a mode of expression, turns to the printed page. He does not learn to write short stories overnight. He studies effects. He studies technique, the value of words and their combinations. He studies conversation. And, in the course of time, let us presume that he learns to write a good short story.

Now for the other. He decides to turn his back to the printed page and tell his story on the celluloid. Are they the same? Does he have to study the same things as his friend? Not at all. He studies effects, that is true, but not the effects of words. He has no use for them. He studies action and pictures of action. He studies scenes and combinations of scenes. He studies

action and he trains himself to see in his mind's eye the action which must become a logical part of a sequence of thought. He studies what can be done with the camera and what cannot. He studies the technique of telling his story on celluloid, or of visualizing his story with the same energy that his friend expended in learning to tell his story with the aid of printer's ink. Let us presume, also, that in the course of time he succeeded.

Now we have two men who are able to tell stories. One uses printer's ink. The other uses celluloid and a screen. Nine out of every ten men will insist that the fiction writer should be able to write scenarios, but how many will even hint that the scenario writer should be able to write fiction? Do you know any one who would? I don't.

It seems that the answer lies in the fact that few men outside a scenario department even dream that there is such a thing as technique in scenario writing, and that, since the scenario writer uses no words, all he needs is the plot. No one would think of saying, however, that the artist, because he uses no words, needs no technique. That would be manifestly absurd. But absurd as it seems in the one case, it is accepted fact in the other.

Properly speaking, the scenarioist should not be called a writer. What he writes is not the story; it is a series of memoranda done with such close attention to detail that a producer can read it without the aid of an interpreter. He does not tell his story by means of words

printed on paper any more than does the artist. He sees a picture in his mind's eye and plans the action which the players are to follow so that collectively they may tell the story on the celluloid. And since their methods of telling their stories are so different, does it not seem absurd to suppose that the plot for the one is, of necessity, a good plot for the other? As a matter of fact, there is not more similarity between the writer of fiction and the scenarioist than there is between a newspaper reporter and a dramatist.

No, there are many modes of expression, many arts, if you prefer. There are music and the dance; there are painting and sculpture; there is verse, the drama, the short story, the novel, and, last of all, there is the scenario. And it is quite as sensible to assume that any other two of them are interchangeable as to insist that the writer of fiction can fill the place of the scenario writer, without first having studied long to master the technique of this, the youngest of the arts.

NOT SO EASY.

After having played the game according to rules for some time, and having gone through most of the experience known to beginners, Mrs. Julia A. Brown, a photo-playwright of Freeport, Me., has paused in her endeavors long enough to look back over what she has done and sum it all up for the benefit of other writers who are just beginning the first lap of their journey to the top. Her article, which shows understanding of the beginners' difficulties, follows:



“‘Write photo plays—devote all of spare time. Experience unnecessary. \$10.00 for first play. Write for particulars.’

“Such an advertisement is often seen in almost any magazine that one happens to pick up. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? The man, anxious and ambitious to earn money by the power of his brain, eagerly grasps at this opportunity not requiring experience, with the belief that it will place him in the land of fame—and, incidentally, bring the money rolling in.

“What’s the first step to be taken in entering this new, get-rich-quick literary field? Why, a book on ‘How to Write Moving-picture Plays,’ of course. Sure thing! The haste with which the necessary cash for purchasing the open sesame is sent away, almost equals the celerity with which editors get rid of undesirable manuscripts.

“The book arrives. It is read and assimilated in a very short time. Dear me! it’s as easy as tumbling off a log—a child could do it. So the hopeful aspirant proceeds to tumble from the log. The jounce he receives to his conceit, self-sufficiency, and pride leaves him in a thick jungle of upset ideas and blasted hopes.

“The vehicle which causes the jounce is written and prepared in an incredibly short time, considering. With superb confidence in editorial human nature, the play is launched on the uncertain waters of literary recognition. Jounce No. 1 comes after a month or two of “watchful waiting” in the form of a long, white, plump envelope which the receiver recognizes only too well.

Rejection slip inside—regrets—return does not necessarily imply lack of merit, et cetera, et cetera.

“The writer gets excited. The idea! The play is as good and ten per cent better than lots of plays I’ve seen. Simply because I’m a new and an unknown writer, it is tossed back to me just as if it were a worthless script. Well, I’ll send it away to another company that has a scenario editor who knows a good thing when he sees it.

“No, wait. Don’t launch it again, yet. That scenario editor had some good reason or reasons for not accepting it. Try to find out what it was. Was the synopsis written in a sufficiently interesting way to attract the editor’s attention? Was the scenario properly developed? Was the plot strong enough and original enough to hold the attention of the audience reading the picture story on the screen? Were there too many scenes, or not enough? And—important, too—was the title good and applicable to plot?

“Here are a few hints in regard to writing photo plays that will apply to the expert as well as the amateur writer:

“First and most important, never copy from any one. If you haven’t enough originality to impart a distinct, particular style of your own to your plays, do not attempt to write. Try to give a snap to your plays. Make a practice of keeping notebook and pencil on hand for the purpose of jotting down any thoughts that may come to you which will furnish material for a play.

Something may flash into your brain during your busiest moments that may make the best play you ever wrote. Get your plot or foundation before you attempt to build the literary structure.

"There are three qualities essential to a really successful photo-playwright, namely, originality, a quick imagination, and a sense of humor. Do not make the mistake of thinking that it is an honor to be included in the large company of literary workers unless you are a reasonably good one.

"While some writers might not approve of the plan, I think it is excellent practice to keep several plots and plays under way at the same time. Like the high-school boy who tosses up four balls in the air at the same time and finds it as easy to keep them going as one ball, so a few trials in handling several subjects at the same time will convince you that you can do it as easily as to handle one.

"Do not be in too much of a hurry in sending your script away, and do not be so foolish as to feel disgruntled because the editor rejects it. If you've entered the big game in earnest, you must stick to it until you've made good. Go over your script carefully to discover and correct any errors you may have made before sending it off. Last, but not least, if you have sufficient reason to warrant you in thinking that you may become a photo-playwright, allow nothing to discourage you, but let your motto be, 'Succeed I will!'

## THERE'S A DIFFERENC

A drawing in a well-known newspaper recently illustrated the contrast between a young man who spent his evenings and other spare time telling "the gang" about what he had done, and another young fellow who devoted his every moment in preparing himself for the future. There wasn't much comment made by the artist other than in the title, which was "If You Talk About Yourself, Others Will Not Talk About You," but to our mind the drawing drove home a great lesson for all those engaged in any line of work, including photo-playwriting. It is not the writer who brags about his first few successes who wins out in the long run. It is the one who continues to work and study so that he will be prepared when his really big chance comes. He does not talk about himself, but the men in the studios to which his work is sent talk about him. They realize that he is one of the few who are in the game to stay and who will be needed by them in a short time. He is mentioned oftener than he thinks. As for the one who talks about himself and his successes—after he has gained one or two—the "big men" never speak of him, for they do not think he is taking the game seriously. Their opinion is formed solely on the submitted work of the two writers, but from that it is easy to judge just about what both are doing.

## WHAT THE PEOPLE WANT.

All of us have heard time and again that the thing to write is "something that will go with the people."

This is seldom explained to the amateur, and, when it is, the explanation given is that "what will go with the people is what they can understand." To the experienced this means much—in fact, it appears to give all the information on the subject that can be desired—but to the new writer it does not mean a great deal. He wonders what the people will understand.

Each individual knows a certain amount about human nature. Some realize how much they know, and study to learn more. Others have gained their knowledge unconsciously, and cannot use it to as good an advantage. Therefore, when a writer begins to study "what the people understand," the first thing he must do is to ascertain how much he already knows of the subject. After taking this inventory he must start to watch other things on his regular visits to the motion-picture theaters, besides the technical end of the pictures and the ideas they contain. He must watch the audience.

Seated in a dark corner, he must keep his eyes and ears busy, and have his mind alert. He must sense—and sense correctly—the attitude of the audience toward everything that happens on the screen.

The first visit an amateur makes to a theater with this end in mind will not yield a great deal. He may feel that it is a thing which cannot be done. The second visit, however, will doubtless disperse this idea and bring him closer to the realization that it is practical. In each succeeding visit, he will advance a little more, until, all of a sudden, he will discover that he almost unconsciously



senses how a picture "is going over" with an audience. When he reaches this point, he will find that the matter of taking a certain style of story and making it into a scenario for a photo play, which is "what the people want and what they understand," is comparatively easy.

#### WORKING OUT SCENE ACTION.

A correspondent in Trenton, New Jersey, has handed us a bit of action which she asks we work out for the benefit of herself and other writers who have not yet learned to break their plots into bits of scene action which tell the story on the screen. Here is the action, written in synopsis form, as she sent it to us:

"Two abductors come from the doorway of a mansion and speed down the street in an auto with James as their captive. Vera and a detective follow in another auto. Both cars pass from the city streets into the country. On a road the chase continues. Shots are fired from both machines. The detective's tire is punctured by a bullet. After making the necessary repairs, Vera and the detective follow the road taken by the abductors, and arrive at the summit of a high hill, just in time to see the abductors carry James into a small house in the distance. They start for the house."

As can easily be seen, no attempt is made at a story, and the beginning and ending is, therefore, abrupt. Taking just what has been written and putting it into scenario form, the result should be something like the following:

1. Exterior of mansion.—Abductors carry James

from within, place him in auto, drive off swiftly. Vera and detective come from within, excited; drive off hurriedly in another machine, which has been standing to side; are in pursuit of abductors.

2. Setting which will carry idea of limits of a city—the joining of a city pavement and a dusty road will do. Abductors' auto drives in, full speed. One of abductors fires pistol back as he passes. Detective's auto dashes through in pursuit. Detective fires toward other car as he pursues it.

3. Country road.—Abductors' car dashes past, closely followed by detective and Vera in his auto. The latter appears to be gaining. Both parties exchange shots as they fly past camera.

4. Country road.—Abductors' car dashes in and past camera. They fire at detective as they pass. Detective's car in; slows down as it nears camera; stops. Detective out. Vera anxious. Detective examines tire.

5. Close range of detective examining tire; show bullet hole in tire plainly.

6. Back to Scene 4.—Detective tells Vera that tire has been punctured by shot from abductors. Starts to put on a new tire.

7. Top of high hill; a little house is seen in distance down road.—Abductors' car dashes through and downhill.

8. Back to Scene 6.—Detective now has new tire put on. He looks at his pistol grimly. Vera frantic with fear for James' safety. They drive off again.

9. Extension of small house seen in distance in Scene 7.—Abductors drive in; jump from car, and start to drag James from it; he struggles.

10. Top of hill—same as Scene 7.—Detective and Vera enter in auto; stop and get out; look through field glasses and try to locate abductors; look downhill toward house and see them.

11. Camera masked to represent field glasses.—Show James struggling as abductors take him from car. Same setting as Scene 9.

12. Back to Scene 10. Detective and Vera finish looking toward house. Jump in auto and drive off for the scene of the struggle at top speed.

That about covers it, we believe. Of course, there are a dozen other ways of working it out. Ours is merely one style. If it is placed at a point where the excitement was supposed to run high, the arrangement we have worked out would probably be most effective, while if it was merely a means of bringing all the characters to the little house, and there working in the real excitement, it could be covered in four or five scenes, which merely sketched the action we have worked out in detail.

We think it best to sound a note of warning to beginners not to copy any of the action in this example, for it was sent to us merely for use as an illustration of technic. There are many illogical things in those few scenes, and it would, indeed, be fatal for any new writer to think this was an example of a plot.

THE DIFFERENCE.

Assuming that a writer has become expert enough to turn out scenarios which will "get by" the editors, let us consider what is required of him in each case.

In preparing a scenario, the writer must bear in mind that what is required is a complete plan, or outline, from which a director can make a finished motion picture. He or she must not leave anything out in any part of it which would be of assistance to the producer. Neither must any needless word painting or characterization be supplied.

In writing a short story, however, making the presumption of the first paragraph, the author prepares the finished product which will be sold to the public. It becomes his duty to see that every detail is clear, and that all parts are perfectly balanced. In other words, it's up to the writer.

Don't for a moment think that this means scenario writers can expect to sell a slipshod script, for they cannot. It simply illustrates the difference between the two mediums of dramatic expression as it really exists, and is given especially for the benefit of the writers who are working at both, and the ones who have been working on short stories, and wish to turn out scenarios. A scenario must be every bit as perfect, in its own way, as a short story is in its; the difference is that the former is meant to convey ideas only, ignoring graceful sentences.

# A MODEL SCENARIO.

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An example of a script prepared properly for the producer is given below, showing exactly what should be done, and how it should be done in order to have your manuscript receive the consideration due to a good plot.

One of the chief reasons for scenarios being returned is that they are not laid out properly to show scene action. There is only one right way—that which is shown in the succeeding pages.

The following script is a one-reel drama, entitled "If I Were Young Again," written by Gilson Willets, and produced recently by the Selig Polyscope Company.

Mr. Willets is one writer who has risen to topmost heights in his profession. His record of past achievements, including the origination of such photo plays as the "Adventures of Kathlyn" series, "The Days of the Thundering Herd," "Your Girl and Mine," et cetera, makes us feel safe in offering his technique as a good example of what is required.

Before the amateur gets in to the script proper, however, we wish him to understand that this is printed merely to show the scene action and general make-up of the script. We have chosen the following scenario because it gives examples of many technical terms, and



is well prepared, not because of the plot which it relates. As this particular script was prepared with several studio requirements in mind, the amateur should not consider the story, characters, or number of interior scenes used, but only the construction, which is excellent.

Following the script are several remarks which will explain various points and terms to beginners.

THE SCRIPT AS IT SHOULD BE SENT TO THE PRODUCER.

“If I Were Young Again.”

Drama of Symbolism in One Reel.

*Synopsis.*

Upon hearing of an opportunity to invest his money in an oil scheme, the old curator at the museum longs to be young again, that he might have the ambition and daring that go with youth. A mummy arrives at the museum of which he has charge, and in its wrappings he finds the elixir of life, one drop of which, if taken with the coming of each new moon, will restore his youth. He takes a drop, and becomes a young man in body, but remains old in mind. His disappearance—as the old curator—is mourned by his friends, especially his old landlady, for whom he cared much. He invests in the oil scheme, and loses all he has. He then tries to find work, but because of his queer combination of old mind and young body does not fit any place. His social life, also, is dreary, and he longs to be old again. His landlady inherits a fortune, and longs to be young again, that she may enjoy it. The curator returns to his room, and tells the landlady all about his experience. She begs

him for a drop of the elixir, but he destroys it, telling her that the only true happiness is in going forward, and that the desire to be young again can only result in unhappiness. He returns to the museum, where he is welcomed by his associates. With his landlady, he finds happiness in the things that spell comfort to the aged.

*Characters.*

The Curator: Part to be played by a young man who, in the first and last part, must make up as an old man.

His Landlady: A sweet, old-fashioned lady.

Chief Director of Museum, Chief Clerk, and three other clerks, four or five girls for dance, one or two extra young men for same.

Boss of business firm advertising for salesman, and one or two other applicants for job, faker selling Mexican oil stocks.

*Scene Plot.*

Interior. Sets, 12. Scenes, 29.

Private office of Head Curator of museum—1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 23, 25, 32.

Private office of Chief Director, same building—2.

Clerk's office—4, 26.

Humble, but cozy, sitting room—11, 16, 29, 33.

Landing at top of stairs, two doors seen—12, 18, 21, 30.

Curator's old-fashioned room—13, 15, 31.

Close-up of "withdrawal" window at bank—14.

Small, cheap-looking, but comfortable room—19, 22.

Office of fake oil company—20.

Office of business firm—24.

Public dance hall of dignified type—27.

Another corner of same dance hall—28.

Exterior. Locations 1 Scenes 2.

Close-up of door of boarding house—10, 17.

There are also two close-range views in the picture which require no background at all, these being in scene 6 and 8.

*Scenario.*

*Leader.* AT THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY. THE HEAD CURATOR.

*Scene 1.*—Private office of Head Curator at Museum of Natural History. Swinging door to office of director; swinging doors to clerks' office. Head Curator at desk, absorbed in examination of the most curious of the specimens.

*Leader:* THE CHIEF DIRECTOR.

*Scene 2.*—Private office of Chief Director; swinging door to Curator's office. Director, reading newspaper, sees something interesting; on screen—newspaper advertisement:

INVEST YOUR SAVINGS.

MEXICAN OIL STOCK.

WORTH DOUBLE IN 30 DAYS.

Director laughs—goes with paper through swinging door to Curator's office.

*Scene 3.*—Same as *Scene 1.*—Curator's office—Curator with specimen (as before). Director in, laughingly shows newspaper. Curator reads and says:

*Cut-in Leader:* "IF I WERE YOUNG AGAIN, I WOULD RISK MY SAVINGS."

Curator produces a savings-bank book, but shows that timidity of old age will keep him from investing.

*Leader:* A MUMMY ARRIVES FROM EGYPT.

*Scene 4.*—Clerk's office. Swinging door to Curator's office. Several clerks at desks, writing. Porters bringing in an Egyptian mummy in case. Curator enters, and is delighted with mummy—orders it carried to his own room office.

*Scene 5.*—Same as *Scene 1.*—Back to Curator's office. Curator in, followed by porters, who deposit mummy in place and exit. Director in—and he and Curator open mummy case. Both delighted with contents. Clerk calls Director off (to sign a paper). Curator (now alone), running hand over swathings of mummy, becomes suddenly curious at what he feels.

*Scene 6.*—Close-up of Curator's hand extracting from swathings of mummy a metal vial.

*Scene 7.*—Back to *Scene 5.*—Curator, in great curiosity, examines ancient writing on vial.

*Scene 8.*—Close-up of metal vial, showing painted ancient writing in Tabic, Egyptian, or Sanskrit.

*Scene 9.*—Back to *Scene 7.*—Curator sits and writes translation of ancient writing. On screen—written translation: "ONE DROP WITH EACH NEW MOON BRINGS BACK YOUTH."

Back to *Scene 9.*—Curator astounded—shakes vial at ear, noting it contains liquid; unscrews cap from vial.

smells contents, looks at newspaper ad of Mexican oil stock, brightens with resolve to test the elixir, and, if successful, to invest in the stock. Is suddenly afraid some one may enter. Looks to both swinging doors, restores cap to vial, and secretes vial and translation on his person. Turns to mummy just as director enters.

*Leader:* THAT EVENING.

*Scene 10.*—Close-up at front door of house in which Curator has lodgings. Curator entering house, using his latchkey.

*Leader:* HIS LANDLADY.

*Scene 11.*—Humble but cozy sitting room in home of Landlady. Landlady sipping tea and petting cat. Curator enters. She invites him to have tea. He, in suppressed excitement, says he is tired and will go up to his room. She smiles, takes dish of fruit from table, and follows him off.

*Scene 12.*—Landing at top of stairs, with two doors. Curator up—opens door of his room with key, followed by Landlady with fruit.

*Scene 13.*—Curator's room—everything old-fashioned and comfortable. Window with withered plant in a pot on sill. Curator in, followed by Landlady with fruit, which she leaves. She gets his slippers and dressing gown. He thanks her. She exits. He now produces the vial and translation—reads latter again: On screen flash translation shown in *Scene 9* for a few feet. Back to *Scene 13.*—Curator raises shade of window, through which a new moon is seen (mechanical effect in studio).



He consults translation, and is satisfied with moon. Resolves to test elixir on the withered plant on window sill. From vial he pours one drop on earth in the pot. The old plant in a Dissolve or Fade-in or Double Exposure changes into a new plant in full blossom. Curator delighted.

*Leader:* HIS LIFETIME SAVINGS.

*Scene 14.*—Close-up at withdrawal window of savings bank. Curator presents bank book and draws out his savings in cash.

*Leader:* THAT NIGHT. THE NEW MOON STILL SHINES.

*Scene 15.*—Same as *Scene 13.*—Curator's lodgings—Curator entering, in suppressed excitement, followed by Landlady with tray of milk and crackers, which she leaves, says good night, and exits. Curator stealthily locks door. Lays the money (his savings) on table. Raises window shade, revealing new moon (as in *Scene 13*). He summons courage for the supreme test—pours one drop of the elixir on his tongue. A feeling of drowsiness steals over him; he lies on divan; sleeps. The metamorphosis takes place—in Dissolve, Fade, or Double Exposure. He changes to a young man in appearance, but retains old clothes. He awakes, rushes to view himself in mirror. In joy he pockets the money, produces a traveling bag, and begins packing a few belongings.

*Scene 16.*—Same as *Scene 11.*—Landlady's sitting room. Landlady by hearth with cat, reading Bible by lamp.

*Leader:* A NEW LODGER.

*Scene 17.*—Same as *Scene 10.*—Close-up a front door of Landlady's house—(tint blue for night). Curator (as young man) steals out through door with his bag, softly closes door, then rings the bell. Landlady opens door. He says he is looking for lodgings; she bids him enter. He notes, with satisfaction, that she does not recognize him. Both enter house.

*Scene 18.*—Same as *Scene 12.*—Landing at top of stairs, with two doors. Curator (as young man) up, followed by Landlady, who opens door of the room next to one the Curator (as an old man) occupied.

*Scene 19.*—Small and cheap-looking, but comfortable, bedroom. Curator (as young man) engages the room, pays Landlady; is careful not to let her see his big roll of money. She bids him good night—exits. He joyfully capers in physical exuberance of youth.

*Leader:* HE REMEMBERS HIS DECLARATION: "IF I WERE YOUNG AGAIN, I WOULD RISK MY SAVINGS."

*Scene 20.*—Office of the fake Mexican old-stock concern. Curator (as young man) showing the fake-stock dealer the newspaper ad. Scene on Screen: Flash few feet of newspaper ad from *Scene 2.* Back to *Scene 20.*—Faker says it is O. K. Curator hands over his savings, receives stock certificates, exits. Faker grins and looks at money.

*Scene 21.*—Same as *Scene 12.*—Landing at top of stairs, with two doors. Landlady from door of Cura-

tor's original room, with newspaper, weeping in sorrow. Curator (as young man), upstairs, asks what distresses her. She shows the newspaper. On screen—newspaper heading, reading:

CURATOR STILL MISSING.

MUSEUM OFFICIALS MYSTIFIED.

NO TRACE OF DISTINGUISHED EGYPTOLOGIST WHO DISAPPEARED A WEEK AGO,  
et cetera—run off.

Back to *Scene 21*.—Landlady descends stairs, weeping. Curator, keeping newspaper, enters his new room.

*Scene 22*.—Same as *Scene 19*.—Curator's new room, Curator (as young man) in with newspaper, which he reads again, and chuckles at news of his disappearance. Glances elsewhere at paper, suddenly appalled.

On screen, another newspaper heading, reading thus:

MEXICAN OIL STOCK FAKE!

INVESTORS RUINED!

Curator realizes he is ruined—breaks down.

*Leader:* IN THE NEED OF MONEY, HE APPLIES FOR THE PLACE OF THE MISSING CURATOR.

*Scene 23*.—Same as *Scene 1*.—Curator's office, director standing by Curator's vacant chair at Curator's desk. Curator (as young man) enters. He has temporary fear that director may recognize him, but finally breathes relieved as director asks what he wants. Curator begs director to give him the position of the missing Curator,

denoting the vacant chair. Director, amazed at request, looks him over, then laughingly says:

*Cut-in Leader:* "YOU'RE TOO YOUNG."

Curator insists he can fill the job; director curtly dismisses him.

*Leader:* ANOTHER ATTEMPT.

*Scene 24.*—Office of firm that had advertised for salesmen; rail with desk behind it. Boss at desk, examining applicants for job. Curator (as young man) applies. Boss snickers at Curator's old-fashioned clothes, and says:

*Cut-in Leader:* "THIS JOB CALLS FOR AN UP-TO-DATE DRESSER!"

Curator off, viewing his clothes in crestfallen manner.

*Leader:* UNDER HIS ASSUMED NAME, HE AT LAST SECURES A CLERKSHIP IN HIS OWN OFFICE.

*Scene 25.*—Same as *Scene 1.*—Curator's office. Curator (as young man) in desperate need of employment, amazing the director by showing intimate knowledge of various specimens which he handles. By denoting swinging door to clerks' office he registers he is anxious to go to work as a clerk. Director decides to employ him. They go through door into clerks' office.

*Scene 26.*—Same as *Scene 4.*—Clerks' office, museum. A vacant desk in foreground—same young clerks at work. Director in with Curator (as young man), whom he introduces to chief clerk, telling of the applicant's

amazing knowledge of specimens. Curator is given the vacant desk. Begins work as director leaves.

*Leader:* HIS FELLOW CLERKS HAVE INVITED HIM TO A DANCE.

*Scene 27.*—Corner of public dance hall of dignified type. Same clerks and others, dancing with their girls. Curator, crossing room, finds himself in the way—despondent, lonely, and brooding.

*Cut-in Leader:* LONELY AND OUT OF TUNE WITH THE YOUNG WORLD.

A vivacious and flirtatious girl is introduced to Curator. She learns that he does not dance, and induces him to follow her off to "sit out" the dance.

*Leader:* THOUGH YOUTHFUL IN APPEARANCE, HE STILL THINKS WITH THE MIND OF AGE.

*Scene 28.*—Another corner in dance hall. Dancers can be seen dancing past a wide doorway. Curator and same vivacious girl seated. She is exercising all her flirtatious arts on him, but he fails to respond. She is peeved and taunts him. Others enter, and, to their merriment, she makes fun of Curator, mimicking his old-mannish ways and thoughtful manner. All exit, leaving Curator miserably unhappy.

*Leader:* THE NEXT NEW MOON. HIS LANDLADY HAS INHERITED A SMALL FORTUNE.

*Scene 29.*—Same as *Scene 11.*—Landlady's sitting room (now with all new furniture as a sign of prosperity). Landlady (in new clothes) seated by fireplace



with cat and Bible, reading by lamp. Curator (as young man) enters, very unhappy. He sits, and landlady tells him of her new wealth—looks longingly into mirror, saying:

*Cut-in Leader:* "IF I WERE YOUNG AGAIN, I COULD ENJOY MY NEW WEALTH."

Curator springs up with idea, lifts window shade, revealing new moon (as produced before), produces the vial, is about to give it to her; suddenly shakes head sadly, saying to her:

*Cut-in Leader:* "NATURE PROVIDES THAT WE SHALL BE HAPPY IN OLD AGE. THE YEARNING TO BE YOUNG AGAIN BREEDS ONLY A DISCONTENT THAT IS NOT WORTH WHILE."

Curator exits, leaving Landlady puzzled. She peers longingly into mirror.

*Scene 30.*—Same as *Scene 12.*—Landlady at top of stairs, with two doors. Curator (as young man) up—starts to enter his new room, but decides to go instead into his own original room, the door of which he opens by using his key.

*Scene 31.*—Same as *Scene 13.*—Curator's original lodgings. Everything just as he left it in *Scene 15.* Curator (as young man) in, brooding. Produces the vial; lifts window shade, revealing new moon (as produced before). He produces the translation:

On Screen: Again flash few feet of translation which is used in *Scene 9.* Back to *scene.* He realizes that to-

night he must again take a drop of the elixir if he is to remain young. Decides to destroy elixir and be old. Opens window, and is about to throw vial out when Landlady enters. She, startled at seeing him in old Curator's room, asks him to explain. He takes newspaper clipping from pocket and gives it to her. She reads it.

On Screen: FLASH NEWSPAPER HEADLINES AS IN *Scene 1*—only a few feet.

Back to *scene*.—Curator tells Landlady he is the old Curator. She bewildered, unbelieving, he shows her the vial and the translation, and explains effect of elixir by showing her the plant in blossom. She, dumfounded, begs him to give her the vial in order that she may be young again, in order to enjoy her new riches. He refuses, holding vial aloft so she can't reach it, and says:

*Cut-in Leader*: "THERE IS NO JOY IN GOING BACKWARD. ALL HAPPINESS LIES IN GOING FORWARD. I SHALL DESTROY THE MUMMY'S SECRET."

In frantic desire to obtain the vial, Landlady pleads with him—leads to violent struggle with him, which at last leaves her exhausted. He empties contents of vial into empty dish on table or dresser, touches a burning match to the liquid. It flames up with smoke. At the same time the Curator (by 'Dissolve, Fade, or Double Exposure) changes back to old man as at beginning of play. Landlady astounded. Old Curator, now very happy, indicates the plant, and they watch, spellbound,

as the blossomed plant (by Dissolve, Fade, or Double Exposure) changes back to the withered plant.

*Leader:* "I HAVE BEEN ON A LONG JOURNEY, IN WHICH I GAINED NOTHING AND LOST EVERYTHING."

*Scene 32.*—Same as *Scene I.*—Curator's office. The old Curator enters, hangs up hat, goes to desk and to work as if nothing had happened. Director enters, thunderstruck; views Curator as one back from dead—then, in great delight, welcomes Curator's return. Curator tells him words of above leader. Director mystified. Curator goes to mummy, examines it, and becomes again the old anthropologist, absorbed in study.

*Leader:* AND, HAVING LEARNED THE FOLLY OF WISHING TO BE YOUNG AGAIN—

*Scene 33.*—Same as *Scene II.*—Landlady's sitting room. Old Curator and old Landlady sitting by fire-light, he smoking pipe. Both gaze to fire, happy in tranquillity of old age. As scene fades out, they clasp hands with smile of understanding.

#### NOTES.

These notes will explain certain terms and methods which apparently puzzle many amateurs, and we advise all those who have studied the scenario to read these over carefully and apply what is in them to their own scripts.

Examples of "Leaders" will be found through this script, they being plainly marked in each case. These are also known by many other names, but leader is the

simplest, and we advise our readers to use it at all times. One appears at the very opening of the story, another between scenes 1 and 2, et cetera.

Scene 3 furnishes an example of "cut-in Leader" and its use. There are others of this type farther on in the script, and, by studying their purpose and seeing how they are used in this script and on the screen, the amateur can easily become familiar with their use.

Two scenes, 6 and 8, give us examples of the "close-up," and if the beginner reads the script over carefully he will find that they explain their presence themselves. They bring something close to the camera for identification if it is to play an important part in the plot.

"Insert," the magic terms which bothers the brains of beginners far more than it ought to, will be found illustrated in scenes 9 and 13.

Note the simple description of the scenes. Nothing more than a sketch of the setting is given, but much can be said in a few words—in scenes 19 and 27, for example. Where a part of the setting is vital to the action of the story, it must be described—as the flower in the window in scene 13.

In scenes 13 and 15, and again later on in the story, a double exposure is called for. We would simply tell the director that it was a double exposure in grammar-school terms—no technical words—but for the benefit of those who have learned the various terms, all are used. These scenes show how this artifice may be successfully used, but it behooves us to caution the amateur to use it spar-

ingly, even though he knows how, if he desires to sell regularly.

The instruction to be given in order to obtain a night effect will be found in scene 17, and the manner to gain other studio effects is illustrated in scene 13, where a "new-moon" effect is called for.

"Flash" scenes are represented by the inserts in scenes 13 and 20. While these inserts are not in themselves seen, nevertheless regular scenes which require only a few feet—as in the cut-back—would be described the same way.

The final fade-out effect may be found in the last scene.



# SHORT SHOTS.

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A DEPARTMENT OF SHORT, SNAPPY HINTS THAT  
ARE DIRECTLY TO THE POINT AND INVAL-  
UABLE TO BOTH AMATEUR AND PRO-  
FESSIONAL PICTURE-PLAY AU-  
THORS IF FOLLOWED OUT.

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Be sure that every scene you write is worth its footage.

The rejection of a script means nothing to an experienced author. He regards everything he writes as a product which he must sell. There are so many reasons for rejections that if the writer feels his story is worthy of production he should send it right out again.

Why did you kill the villain in that last script? Wouldn't it have been better to allow him to live and suffer for his misdeeds?

Try placing yourself in an editor's place and looking over your scripts with his cold, critical eye. Do they stand the test?

Action is the word. You can't write a photo play with a lot of fancy sentences.

Why doth the amateur persist in thinking a single-reel plot will make a two-reel film?

Scenario writing is one of the few branches of fiction work that was not hit by the war.

Even the best writers have to fight to keep from getting into the rut, so the amateur must realize this is one of his greatest dangers.

The great trouble with many scripts is that their action is too melodramatic and improbable.

When the typewriter begins to "kick," finish your script on scrap paper, via the pencil route, and recopy it on the machine the next day. Don't wait until you can fix your machine, or the spirit of your work will be broken.

A writer must learn to take, to add, and to combine in order to get fresh incidents for his plot.

We see lots of plots that start for no particular place and reach their destination very quickly.

The more condensed the time of your action is, the better the dramatic effect is sure to be.

A great deal of thought before you begin to write your scene action is better than a great deal of rewriting is after you discover you had a weak plot.

It is well for those beginning to write for the first time to remember that the plays which last longest in the minds of those who visit the picture theaters are not those which carry a literal "punch." There is another kind of "punch" which can be placed in pictures, and which will bring home the check. Master it.

The broader view of life you have, the better photo plays you will turn out.

Better for an amateur to carefully study one single-reel subject on the screen than to give the "once-over" to a dozen features.

There are many things in the world besides love. Let's give the screen some of them.

It is very well to be a dreamer, but be sure you can "cash in" on your dreams.

Knowing actors and actresses of screen fame personally does a scenario writer little good—unless he likes to tell his friends about it.

Remember to keep a carbon copy of all you write. If you don't, there will be woe and sorrow in your bungalow some day.

Missing—screen plays which conceal their dénouement until the last scene.

Can you tell something new when you see it on the screen?

Don't let the call of the open take you from your work. Listen to the call of the check.

Every time you spend a nickel or dime for a ticket to a picture show consider it in the nature of an investment, and be sure that you gain on it.

Things worth obtaining have to be sought. That applies to scenario writing in many ways.

Do you know just what future position you are preparing yourself to hold down? It will be well to learn; and if it is in the picture field, you will find no end of hard work confronting you before you reach it. But the game certainly is worth the candle.

Draw characters from life, and paint them with fiction water colors before putting them on exhibition for the public.

Playing the same tune over and over again on a phonograph makes you tired, doesn't it? Think of the poor editor and the hackneyed plot, then!

Don't trust to "luck." Be sure that your photo play is superior to its vast field of competitors before sending it out.

A writer with his heart in his work cannot enjoy loafing, while the person who writes a little now and then, just to be a "writer," is generally given over to the popular pastime of "resting."

We are still "strong" for the short-length comedy-drama.

Patience is one of the scenarioist's stocks in trade.

The dream of every director whose heart is in his work is to gather about him a staff of writers who can furnish him with sure-fire "working" scripts.

The cut-back system is a blessing or a curse, depending on how the writers use it. Editors will bear testimony.

Love of one's work is essential to success in photo-play writing, as well as in other lines of endeavor.

When the brain begins to tire, it is time to quit, but this should not be taken as an excuse by writers who are trying to "square" themselves with their conscience for shirking.

Is the script you are working on the best you have ever written? It should be.

If you were building a house you would give each step

considerable thought. It should be the same when you build a photo play.

Play is necessary to life, but not too much of it.

A single sale may mean much to a photo-playwright, but a bit of wisdom which can be used effectively later on means more.

Why write war plays in times like the present?

The sinking of a Hudson River day boat or the wrecking of the Palace of Jewels at the Frisco Fair are easy accomplishments—in the minds of some writers.

We wonder if scenarioists realize that the offers of some of the larger companies to pay one hundred dollars a reel and better for truly worthy scripts is an honest-to-goodness fact? We fear that the material they submit does not prove that they do.

The bigger the plot, the longer the film, and the weaker the plot the less chance of sale.

There is a better market at the present for one-reel scenarios of worth than there was six months ago.

A cramped imagination is a writer's worst handicap.

Why persist in writing highly romantic stuff into a story dealing with modern life? It can be done successfully, but one must know how.

Wanted—Something else in photo plays besides the "love, hate, revenge" plots.

When a writer seems discouraged and tells every one he is going to quit turning out scenarios, it is a sure sign he is getting ready to spring a five-reeler or a serial on the innocent editors.



The more compact you make your script, the harder it will figuratively "hit" the editor when he reads it.

Don't think that just because you have read "oodles" of books that the men who send back your first feeble efforts are unqualified for their position. Maybe they have been reading much longer than you have.

The ability to appreciate what is really amusing and what is really dramatic in real life is what makes successes of authors who create reel life.

Practice makes perfect, but the practice has to be intelligent. The mere "grinding out" of a script a week in an indifferent way will never help you to success. Learn something with every scenario you write.

The omission of a dramatic possibility from the play or story of another writer may furnish you with an entire plot; only be sure you get away off from the original.

Learn to think first and write afterward.

Don't scatter your action too much. The more you can contract it, the more strength it will have.

Getting a new "slant" at an old plot is the process which brings home the bacon nine times out of ten. If you refuse to admit that there are any old plots, you are sure to write trite stories.

The ups and downs of the photo-playwright are many, but through all his trusty typewriter sticks by his side.

A carefully chosen library is an invaluable asset to any author.

For Men—Smoking a pipe while writing is only a

habit, and not altogether a good one if the smoke gets in your eyes.

Do without leaders wherever possible, but do not omit them if they are necessary to the story.

Learn your own ways, and write accordingly.

When tired, a happy thought for a photo-playwright to have is that every scene he writes brings him nearer to the thing he is working for—success.

When an idea comes to you, use it if you can, and if not, file it away for some future day when your brain is not so productive.

Have you ever tried to see just how much you could tell in a three or four-word title without revealing your plot?

We have worked out a salable scenario from a word taken from the dictionary. Have you ever tried it?

If the "open market" becomes a reality in the near future, many writers will find things greatly changed. It's up to each individual to discover whether he will be helped or hindered by his present methods, and to govern himself accordingly.

Some writers work best in the evening, while others turn out their cleverest work long before others in their homes are awake in the morning.

The play with an unexpected but plausible climax is the one which will make the author be remembered by "the men above."

If you find that writing dramas and melodramas don't pay, why not try comedies?

Do you mold your characters from life, or do you pattern them after the children of other authors' brains? The former method is sure to win for you in the long run.

Unexpected twists and turns in the course of a plot will hold the interest of your audiences wonderfully.

Long hours of work bring success nearer, but the effect on your health is dangerous if you overdo. Learn your own writing capacity and try never to exceed it.

Telling other people what one knows about motion pictures is a very nice pastime, but it doesn't mean dollars and cents in the bank for the informer.

Are you alive at all times to the various changes going on within the film game? Live-wire script writers always are, for they know these changes are sure to affect them sooner or later.

At the outset of his career, the writer must begin to look about him and to pick up new ideas on all sides.

Learn to give directions in your scenes without mixing the wording up so that a director misses your meaning.

Be careful in your selection of subjects for your scenarios. Much good time is wasted developing a hopeless idea.

Many a photo play works out nicely to a certain point, and then sends the audience home wondering what it was all about.

There is no questioning the fact that a player's personality will draw the crowds, but what will bring them

back oftenest is a story which holds their interest from start to finish.

Some manufacturers have just realized that the cause of so many poor pictures is overproduction. Photo-playwrights knew that poor stories written by them could be blamed on this cause long ago.

Do you strive hardest after an original idea or a perfect technical script? The former is always preferable.

Make one figure stand out above all others in your cast, and try to impress this figure on your audiences.

We think that it will not be long before stories without very much love interest will be popular with screen fans throughout the world.

A factory must be kept supplied with material in order to turn out products; your brain must be supplied with ideas in order to turn out scenarios.

The dreamer who is a practical man four-fifths of the time is quite an oddity and also a valuable person to himself and others.

Don't be afraid to tell a writer friend who is trying to reach the top how you have learned. He may be able to help you in the future.

The more one studies, the more one knows.

A strong climax is one that is necessary to write a picture play regardless of what else you have, and a strong climax is generally the result of a good idea.

No director lives who does not like a story with a "punch."

What is it you see on the screen that tells you the

story? Pictures that move, is it not? Certainly! There you have the basic principle of a scenario—action.

A miscast photo play is one of the saddest sights in the world.

There is a lot of room at the top of the ladder for the man who is capable of making the climb.

Intelligent use of old ideas in new ways, as part of new plays, is always acceptable.

Study the existing conditions of humanity. There is an unlimited field for plot material here.

Why not look over your rejected scripts? There may be a valuable idea stored away in your "scenario tomb."

Always remember that a big idea deserves big development, and work on your brain productions accordingly.

A three-reel drama in which the interest is sustained from start to finish is, indeed, a rare specimen of its kind.

"As a man thinketh, so he is." Those were the words of some fellow or other in the past, and they certainly apply to the twentieth-century writer—the photo-playwright—and his chances of success.

It is well for present-day photo-playwrights to realize that the authors in the early days of motion pictures had no one to assist them along their rocky course.

Some writers think it quite cute to see how close they can come to offending the censors without having their pictures rejected, but the manufacturer does not see anything "cute" about it.

It is what we do every day that is paving our way for the future, though many do not realize the fact.



Playing upon the sympathy of an audience is the surest way to gain their attention. Overdoing the "sympathy act" is the surest way to lose it.

A reputation is built up either through work or unbiased exploitation. In the former case it may be compared to an iron wall; in the latter, to an eggshell.

A baseball player on the field often protests when he is called out by the umpire on a close decision, but it seldom does him good, though it often costs him some of his salary for fines. Isn't there something similar between that and the "howling" script writer with a rejection in his hand?

FILM COMPANIES WHO BUY.

American Film Manufacturing Company, Santa Barbara, California.

Balboa Amusement Producing Company, Long Beach, California.

Biograph Company, No. 807 East One Hundred and Seventy-fifth Street, New York, New York.

Thomas A. Edison, Incorporated, No. 2826 Decatur Avenue, Bronx, New York, New York.

Kalem Company, No. 235 West Twenty-third Street, New York, New York.

Keystone Film Company, Nos. 1712 to 1719 Allesandro Street, Los Angeles, California.

Lubin Manufacturing Company, Indiana Avenue and Twentieth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Mutual Film Corporation, No. 4500 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, California.

Selig Polyscope Company, No. 58 East Washington Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, No. 1600 Broadway, New York, New York, and Universal City, California.













